

1148
LEWIS
STREET

A Long Journey

MAMA TAMU S. KANYAMA

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1148 Lewis Street

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**My Great Ancestors upon who's shoulders I stand; To you I give thanks for your sacrifices and struggles, and all that you endured, as you laid progressive tracks for me to follow. I am humbled by your strength and uplifted by your love.

Last but certainly not least! I thank the all mighty creator for so much, for the many gifts of life that have been bestowed upon me. In spite of some extremely difficult and painful experiences that i have suffered, i know that i am blessed.

Forward

I am honored and blessed to be asked to write the forward for this publication written by Tamu Sana Kanyama aka Ann Norman. We have known each other since 1973. We are both New Afrikans. We met while working on the defense committee for the RNA-11. As you read Tamu's story, you will see examples of her ingenuity, tenacity, and self-determination. She is not easily turned from her purpose even when militarily attached my police, FBI, and others. I have witnessed her success in bringing black history into schools, churches, and community. I humbly encourage all to read this book. It is a prime example of the realities of personal struggles of the unknown warriors who live and work for the betterment of our people.

The strength of her family's history and the impact of their stories filled her with pride and a sense of knowing that obstacles can be overcome. Like Tamu, many youths learned about the problems of our people when we overheard the adults talking to each other. Her ability to establish and maintain good credit as a child put her ahead of her time and was based on what she saw in her family. Tamu is a good example for youth today who are learning to have bank accounts and function successfully with finances. Tamu gives credit to learning through experiences with entities such as the Nation of Islam, Civil Rights, college organizing, PG-RNA (Provisional Government of the Republic of New Africa), TOP Centers, and others as providing enlightenment and upliftment in her life.

Tamu (Sweet) is a living example of the PG-RNA Oath of Allegiance and the New Afrikan Creed. She holds the words" within her heart and lives them. "For the fruition of black power, for the triumph of black nationhood, I pledge to the

Republic of New Africa and to the building of a better people and a better world my total devotion, my total resources, and the total power of my mortal life. Free the Land." She and the children support and embody the Affirmations of the African Community Centers for Unity and Self-Determination (ACCUSD) founded by her husband Baba Hekima Kanyama. I am sure she will continue her path to move our people to a better space and place throughout time.

Although I knew of Tamu Kanyama because of the attack on the RNA-11, I did not meet her until about 1973. I remember the conversations Tamu and I had about her desire to have children. Her commitment to family then and now has been and still is awe inspiring to me. When I look at Tamu's life I think of the words in a song: "to dream the impossible dream, to right the unbearable wrong, to strive with her last ounce of courage, to run where the brave dare not go". I hope people enjoy this book as much as I do. God bless you and yours my sister Tamu. It is an honor to share this lifetime.

Iya Kahina Ghafoor Shabazz

Provisional Government of the Republic of New Afrika/
PGRNA

Citizen of Record

New Afrikan Security Force Person

Former Vice-Consul and Consul - Camden, New Jersey
Consulate

Former National Treasurer PGRNA

Former Secretary to President Imari Obadele I, PGRNA

African Community Centers for Unity and Self-Determination - Member, Bookkeeper,

Ifa, Priest of Obatala

Community Activist

I -- We

As you read this book you will notice the use of the upper-case letter 'W' in the word We, and the lower-case letter 'i' when referring to myself. The Ideology of the Republic of New Afrika emphasized the concept that the group is more important than the individual. We use the lower case 'i' when referring to ourselves, and the upper case 'W' when referring to the group (family, community, nation), to illustrate that point.

My Early Years

Sitting at the kitchen table on Sunday morning, everyone is dressed for church as we wait to begin having breakfast that mom is preparing. I sit patiently with my sisters, Mattie, Doris, Kay, Bernice and Birda, my brother, Isaiah, Jr., and my dad as mom continues bringing food to the table. I already know which piece of fried chicken i'm gonna get. Whenever mom served chicken, my sister, Birda (We call her 'Micki') and i, as the youngest children, received the wing or the drumstick. Isaiah, however, who truly did not like chicken and would not eat it, would always have steak. My sisters, Doris and Kay decided to falsely claim that they, like Isaiah, did not like chicken as well, in hopes of also receiving steak. Mom, aware of their motive for the bogus claim, but rather than appear to play favorites, would serve them steak as well. But just to make it perfectly clear to them that she had picked up on their scheme, she would say, "when you get grown, i bet you're gonna eat chicken and anything else you can get!" Sure enough, when grown and on their own, chicken became a regular item on their dinner menu. I never quite mastered a maneuver for larger pieces of chicken, so i had no alternative but be satisfied with the smaller pieces until it was my time. For years though, i mistakenly believed that i was unhappy with wings and drumsticks. It was not until i reached adulthood that it dawned on me that i preferred wings over other parts of the chicken. Perhaps it was just the fact that i had no choice but to enjoy those parts apportioned to me, especially when they were the smallest pieces.

Being the youngest in the family often has its perks overall, but the drawbacks, while minimal, can be terribly annoying!

I was the youngest in a family of nine children in Taylor County, Georgia. Dad was a hard-working man and achieved what could be considered a good living. We always had everything that We needed. A farmer, he grew plenty of vegetables and raised many farm animals. My Mom was also very hard-working, creative, smart, and canned almost everything imaginable, even chitterlings. Dad built her a special pantry where she stored foods in Mason jars. Dad had a 'smoke house' adjacent to our house where he stored smoked hams and a variety of other meats. Dad's family often visited and helped themselves to whatever was in the smoke house. My mother's dad was also a skilled farmer who grew an assortment of crops, including rice. Dad and my maternal grandfather harvested wheat that was used for making bread. While dad's earnings were more than sufficient, he also loved to party, so a fair amount of money was spent on alcohol and good times. Several of his family members were party people also. Mom's family, on the other hand, were more laid back and reserved. With these glaring differences in familial behaviors, gatherings of the two families were rare. Yet both sides of the family got along well for the most part with an unspoken mutual respect and minimal conflict. Some of dad's family felt that mom's family was 'uppity' and sarcastically referred to mom as the "rich lady". I suppose they called her that because of her high standards; she did not drink alcohol and, as a Christian woman who attended church regularly, she simply desired the best for her children. Dad often assisted his family when in need and some of them even worked for him on the farm. We lived relatively well and might have done much better if my mom had handled the family finances.

My mom's dad, Archie Colbert, was well respected in the community. He attended church regularly, worked hard to take care of his family and established a reputation for being multi-talented. His abilities included being a skilled carpenter who built furniture and houses. He was most appreciated by the community for having some of the best barbeque around. I say that because people came from all over to purchase and enjoy his barbeque. I am told that he barbequed in the same manner as our people on the continent, which was in a pit dug in the ground. They also said that his barbeque was so good that folks would buy the bones to cook with. I never met either of my grandfathers. My mom's dad died before i was born, but i enjoyed listening to stories about him. I am still unclear as to the story of my dad's father since not much was spoken regarding him. Often during that time, people never learned the truth regarding the fate of their loved ones who simply would disappear. They could have been killed, hung, wrongfully imprisoned, or even died working on a chain gang. Reportedly, my grandfather, my dad's father was one of those. My family never knew exactly what happened to him. The story is that he had to leave town or would certainly have met with a torturous lynching death.

My grandfather was employed by a white man as a laborer in the early nineteen-hundreds. One evening, my grandfather's employer came to my grandparent's house and asked my grandfather if he would go on an errand for him. When he thought my grandfather was well on his way, he proceeded to attempt to rape my grandmother. Well, my grandfather was suspicious and returned to the house where i am told that he saw the man molesting my grandmother, attempting to rape her. My grandfather grabbed that man and cut him badly as he pulled him away from his wife, leaving him for dead. My grandfather knew that he would surely die for committing such an act, even though he was defending his wife's honor.

Protecting his wife would not matter in the least to a mob of whites because when a white man forced himself on a Black woman, it was not considered rape! White folks refused to acknowledge that a Black person was worthy of any level of respect. For his own safety as well as the security of his family, my grandfather knew that he had to leave town immediately. Before leaving though, he made sure that his wife and children were secure and in a safe place. Once he departed, he was never heard from again. We suspect that he was successful in getting away because the white people were looking for him for a long time, as they harassed various people in the community. They found out where my grandmother and her children lived and began to badger and threaten them. One white guy held my dad, who was just a little boy at the time, over a well and threatened to drop him if he did not reveal his father's location. Dad convinced the man somehow that he indeed did not know his dad's whereabouts. To this day, i am saddened by that story and the horrific mental image of a small boy fearing for his very life. Just as my dad's father, my dad was forced to leave Georgia as well. When i was only two years old, my dad left and moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin with his sister Bessie because of a debt dispute with a white guy. My dad purchased a cow from the white guy and paid him in cash. Then, days later, the white guy returned attempting to collect payment for the cow a second time. He claimed that my dad still owed him money, but my dad stood up to the guy and insisted that he had already paid him for the cow and that he would not pay him again. This was the late 40's and early 50's when it was dangerous for a Black man to strongly disagree with anything that he was being accused of by a white person. My mom had told my dad that he should have gotten a receipt when he paid for the cow, but my Dad didn't listen. He said, "well, i know that i paid him for the cow, and he knows that i paid him, so We don't need a receipt, besides We've been doing business together for a long time, and We have never bothered about a receipt." Mom warned

him that he could not trust everything that some people say. When the guy came back to collect again, my dad had no proof of the transaction, yet he refused to give the guy more money. Tempers flared and the white guy left in a fit of rage, as this "uppity Nigger had the nerves to argue with him." My family could sense that there would be trouble. What often happened in these situations is that the white guy would gather a "posse" to catch the black person with intent to do great harm or even take his life. So, in the best interest of our family as well as Dad's safety, my dad moved to Milwaukee. A few months later, after landing a job, my dad returned for the remainder of the family, except for my two oldest sisters, Hattie M. Biddle and Eula M. Green, who were married and had started families of their own. Had my dad stayed, he would certainly have been killed or severely beaten by a mob of white men. My family departed during the night and first, traveled to Atlanta to my uncle Buddy's (Artis Colbert) house to regroup, then continued to Milwaukee. We took very few items with us, mostly just clothes. I have limited recollection of my life prior to the move to Milwaukee, only the stories that were told during dinner or other family functions.

Upon arriving in Milwaukee, We moved in with my dad's sister, Aunt Bessie, her grandson Gerald, and her husband, Robert. Bessie had a rather large house, yet we were still somewhat cramped since there were nine people moving into a house that had previously been occupied by only three. My family occupied two bedrooms while a few of my sisters slept in the dining room on a roll-away bed. My family appreciated my aunt for allowing us to live with her until we could find a place, but it was in no way a pleasant experience. Although my aunt and her husband were genuinely nice, at least to my siblings and myself, my family did not feel welcome, especially my mom. My aunt could be very nasty to mom at times. I was

too young to realize how my family was being treated. Suffice it to say, my family really did not like living there.

My Aunt made mom's life a real nightmare. Then there was my cousin, Bessie's grandson Gerald, who was spoiled rotten. He picked on us constantly. He would taunt us saying, "git your hat, git your coat and git out!" Then he would also say, "Ma Bess, when you gonna put them out"? He was quite a character. Because i was a little girl, he played with me and acted as though he cared about me, and, as a young child, if you played with me and were nice to me, of course i trusted you. One day he picked me up, pulled my pants down and sat me on a red-hot heater and burned my little butt! Yet, he was not spanked or chastised in any manner! In fact, he never got in trouble for anything that he did - no matter the extent of his misdeeds. However, he knew not to violate any of us if my big sister Mattie was home. Well, she was home that day and she heard me scream. She ran to see what was wrong with me and she let him have it! We were in the kitchen, and she hit him so hard that he slid into the next room and landed under his dresser! Aunt Bessie was angry that he had been beaten up, but he deserved it! Another day Mattie was home and Gerald hurt my brother, and she got him again! Once, when Mattie was not at home, Gerald was throwing darts and deliberately threw a dart that hit my sister Bernice (Teen) in her back! He was a real terror, but my sister Kay, was about the same age as Gerald and they fought constantly, with Kay the usual victor. During one of their altercations, he angered her to the extent that she picked up an iron skillet to hit him with, but Uncle Robert stopped her before she struck him. It goes without saying that We were relieved to move from that situation. I was only two to three years old and imagined all was fine except for my cousin Gerald. Aunt Bessie was always nice to me and i loved her and simply adored her husband. We had a great relationship. My uncle and i were so close that he believed that i had more love

for him than for my own father! Attempting to prove his point, he once sat me upon the table to ask me, in the presence of my dad, who i loved more, him or my dad. He was certain that i would choose him, but i surprised him. I responded, "well Uncle Robert, i love you a lot, i really do, but daddy is my daddy!" That was the end of that! For me things were good at my aunt's house but i was completely unaware of the hell that the rest of my family was going through, especially my mom.

Ordinarily, Dad and Aunt Bessie enjoyed a pleasant relationship. Bessie was always nice when dad was around. One day my dad was ill and stayed home from work, but my aunt was unaware of his presence. One of Bessie's friends was visiting, and the two were engaged in general gossip. At one point in the conversation, Bessie began speaking of my family in a negative manner. She was telling her friend about how much money it was costing her to take care of us and other false claims. As dad lay in bed listening, he was absolutely astounded by what Bessie was saying! Having heard enough, dad got up, stormed into the room where they were, and began fussing and shouting at Aunt Bessie in refute of her lies and assertions. He stressed to her that We were renting two rooms and paying the same amount as any other tenant would pay, and that We were buying our own food, so there was no way our stay could be considered freeloading. Finally, he told Bessie that We would continue to pay our own way and would be out of her house as soon as possible. Bessie was rendered speechless! Of course, dad never mentioned the incident to my siblings or me, but my older sisters were able to gleam bits and pieces from conversations between our parents. Bessie's attitude and behaviors improved dramatically after the big feud. Obviously, Bessie was feeling a great deal of shame and guilt for her actions and comments directed at our family.

Our first winter in Milwaukee was far from comfortable. As if the struggle to find a house, having to put up with the unnecessary agony of living with Aunt Bessie, and my mom's tedious search for work were not stressful enough on our parents, to add to their frustrations, they almost lost me! I was fascinated by the ice and snow, so i often sneaked out onto the porch to play without being properly dressed for the cold weather. There were long icicles that formed above the porch and i liked licking and playing with them. Well, playing in the severe cold without proper attire resulted in a bout with double pneumonia! I recovered after spending two weeks in the hospital. I have no memory of my stay in the hospital, but it must have been pleasant as i recall my mom saying that i told her, "Mother, i love the doctors and the doctors love me." Back home from the hospital, Bessie and Robert surprised me with a new snowsuit! They were always so sweet to me. Even after my family moved out of my aunt's house, our relationship remained strong. Bessie enjoyed bestowing gifts on my sisters, my brother, and me, and was pleased whenever We visited her, which was not often.

While still at my Aunt's house, i often had friends over on the porch to play. My aunt had beautiful flowers in wooden planters all around the banister that were suspended by strong wire. One day We were on the porch waiting for my uncle Robert to come home and give me his lunch box. When Robert got home, We were excited and eager, so i asked everyone to sit down. However, one little girl had gotten her sweater caught on a wire that held one of the planters. I was so anxious for her to sit down that i went over and snatched her sweater to free it from the wire. Big mistake! That wire sprang up and cut my eyelid, barely missing my eye. All i could see was blood. Of course, that ended our little fun time. Someone ran and got my mom, but when she saw the blood, she fainted! I was taken to

the hospital and had several stitches in my eyelid. It was a miracle that there was no damage to my eye or my vision.

There were fun times at my aunt's house. My first birthday party was at my aunt's house. What i recall most fondly is the ice cream. There were several children attending, who were all older than me and had ice cream in little Dixie cups. But, since it was my birthday, i had a whole pint all by myself! How cool was that to a little kid? I always had money because my uncle kept a bank for me and whenever i received any money, i would run and give it to him to save for me. When i was four, my uncle took me to pick out and purchase my own tricycle with my money. I was so proud of that! I have fond memories of my aunt and uncle, but there is nothing like being in your own space.

The Black Community was considerably small in Milwaukee. Neighborhood playmates were plentiful. Housing was scarce however, as families were renting and living in basements and garages. I guess some people thought that We were lucky to at least be living in a nice comfortable house, but i know that my mom would have preferred living in a basement or garage rather than deal with my aunt's nonsense.

My parents searched vigorously for housing, and finally found a small house that they did not particularly care for but desiring to escape the tension at my aunt's house, it was the best option at the time. While the house left a lot to be desired, We were simply happy to have our own place. We had to clean and sanitize and make repairs before We could move in. Finding a house to rent was difficult, especially for a Black family with children.

In the early spring, We moved into our own space, a house in the same neighborhood as Bessie. We were not in that house

for long though, not even one year, and We moved several times in the three succeeding years. My parents were determined to find the ideal home for us.

We remained in contact with my aunt and uncle, and even my cousin Gerald would visit us. My aunt Bessie passed away when I was about seven years old. We all missed her. Bessie had been a major part of our lives. Uncle Robert and i remained close until his death when i was about eleven years old. He visited our family occasionally and he always remembered my birthdays and bought me nice gifts. I was really crushed when he passed away. Robert was a special uncle, and i know he surely had the same special feelings toward me.

Childhood Positive Attitude

I grew up feeling secure and confident about myself. I believed that i had the greatest family in the world. In my mind, my big sisters were all so beautiful and smart. When my sisters, Doris and Kay were in high school they were always winners in the "best dressed" competitions, so i thought they really had it going on. My brother, Isaiah, was very handsome and smart, making all "A's" in school. My big sister Mattie spent a lot of time with me and took me almost everywhere she went. When mom first started working, Mattie even took me to school with her since i was too young to begin school, but that was not for long. I cried when i was taken to a kindergarten class because i wanted to be with my big sister. I just might have been allowed to stay had it not been for my crying, i guess schools were a lot more liberal then, than they are now. Too young for school and both parents working, i was left with a sitter, Miss Sallie, a lady who lived downstairs from Aunt Bessie. Miss Sallie and mom had become friends while We were living with Bessie.

My parents, still seeking a more fitting home for our family moved us to a few different residences. We moved to an all-white area, which was all that my parents could find at the time, and six of us were enrolled in Story School. My parents were unaware that the city was so racially separated and that We had moved into an area where We were unwelcome.

As i recall, there were only two Black families at the school which was the reality for many Black folks moving into all-white neighborhoods during the 50's. My first encounter with

racial issues was during my kindergarten year. Isaiah, who was academically astute, and well mannered, applied to become a 'cadet' or, hall monitor as some would call it, but for no apparent reason was not accepted. We went home and told Mattie, our oldest sibling in Milwaukee. Mattie was a tiny young girl, 90 pounds with bricks in her pockets and stood about 4',11". Well, she went to school with us the next morning (without my parents' knowledge) and i have no idea what she said to the office staff. All i know is that by the end of the day, Isaiah was not only a cadet, but was captain of cadets! Suffice it to say, Mattie did not play! She was truly our protector in many ways. There were a few other racial incidents at school, that my family encountered. My kindergarten class made ornaments to give to our parents for Christmas gifts. As my siblings and i happily walked to board the bus, a little white girl grabbed my ornament and tore it! I was so hurt and angry that i lit into her with all that i had in me. We tussled on the ground and in the snow. When my siblings finally separated me from that girl, i was still kicking and crying, but they would not let me go. I really wanted to get that little girl for ruining my parent's gift! Fortunately, We only attended that school for one year.

My parents moved the family to a house across town where we attended Ninth Street School in a predominately Black area. The neighborhood was much better for us socially but We were only there for a short time. We really liked the new house though. It was nice and spacious and We even had a playroom. One memory of our playroom is when my dad brought us a toy wood burning, iron stove. We had little iron pots and skillets that resembled real cookware. We were not allowed to make an actual fire in our stove but one day one of my big sisters made a fire in it for us and We cooked rice in one of the pots on our stove. No one ate the rice, but the excitement of having cooked something in our stove was exhilarating! While living there, my dad's nephew came up from Georgia and moved in

with us. Shortly after, and without my parent's knowledge or permission, he sent for his wife and their four children. Mom welcomed them and made room for them. Unfortunately for us, that meant We had to give up our playroom, but since there were more children for us to play with, it was a good tradeoff. While i was not cognizant of the overcrowded situation, it must have been a bit tight, because mom began looking for a bigger house.

By 1953, my mom had had it! She decided that the only solution to our housing problem was to purchase a house of our own. Mom bought the house where i would spend the rest of my childhood and my young adult life. We moved to 2335 B North 14th street. It was a two-family home. Our family moved into the lower level and my dad's nephew and his family moved into the upper level. The neighborhood was predominately white, but on the 'right side of town', the north side. When We moved in, there were two other Black families in our neighborhood, but in just a few years, the neighborhood was predominately Black. I had no understanding what "white flight" was at the time, but as i grew older, i realized that is exactly what had happened.

In no time at all, We met our new Black neighbors. One of the families were the Newels who We had known from our old neighborhood when living with Aunt Bessie. The other family was the Rodgers, who lived in front of our house. The Rodgers had two daughters, one my age, and the other younger. The Newels had two children also, Sheryl and Jerome. Jerome was only one year older than myself, while his sister, Sheryl was a few years my senior. My family and the Newels were extremely close. Jerome was like a kid brother to Isaiah, and they spent lots of time together. Jerome and i liked each other from childhood until adulthood, but We never dated, kissed, held hands, or even admitted that We liked each other. You might call it

an unspoken love. Some people who knew us thought that We would grow up and eventually get married. Sheryl was stricken with a disease that was much like polio, so she was not out and active as a child. As time went on though, her health improved to the point where We enjoyed good times together. Sheryl had a fabulous collection of dolls that preceded the Barbie Doll. When Sheryl outgrew her appeal for dolls, she gave me the entire collection, including accessories. I was so elated! I had everything that was available for dolls at that time, furniture, doll house, and even full wardrobes. My favorite doll accessory was ice skates. Since there sometimes was frost in my mom's freezer, whenever i had the chance, i dressed my dolls in their ice-skating outfits and let them ice skate in the freezer. Luckily, i was never caught. I had a ball and believed that my dolls did too.

With so many children in a household, there is bound to be impromptu childhood creativity. Playing in the freezer with my dolls was my idea of fun, but We all had fun using the flames of our gas stove as camp fire. When no adult was present, We would roast marshmallows and sometimes hot dogs in the flames. Had We been discovered, We would have been in big trouble, first because it was dangerous and secondly We probably made a mess. I guess my sisters and my brother did a good job of cleaning up, after We finished, because We never heard a word about a messy stove.

Teen (Bernice), Birda (Micki), and i liked watching our dolls enjoy themselves, so We created our own version of a merry-go-round. Our older sisters had a record player, and our dolls had chairs. We would take turns sitting our dolls in their chairs on a record, turn the record player on and the dolls would go for a ride as the records revolved on the turn table. Teen could sew and made cute little outfits for her dolls. Micki and i were jealous because her dolls were always better dressed

than our dolls. One day Teen bathed her doll, dressed her in an outfit she had sewn, combed her hair into a cute style, then laid her on the heater to keep warm. When she unwrapped her doll the heat had melted and twisted one of her legs. Yes, it was wrong of Micki and me, but We laughed to see how her doll had become deformed. We realize now that We were just envious of how well Teen took care of her dolls. My fun did not end with dolls.

Sam's was a corner store in our neighborhood (owned by Sam & Rose). Sam and Rose were very fond of me. As a child, i knew that adults in the community had credit at the store as did my parents. They would purchase items during the week and pay their bill on their pay day. Since i received my allowance on Friday of each week, that was pay day for me. So, i established a line of credit at Sam's Store, just as the adults. I learned that i could obtain items throughout the week without having money, then pay my bill on Friday. My friends wondered how i had goodies all week long. I guess some children spent most or all of their allowance as soon as they got it. I never allowed my credit to exceed my allowance and be broke. My good thing lasted until my mom found out! To this day, i am not sure how she found out, but she did and, as they say, stuff "hit the fan". I saw nothing wrong with having my own credit, after all, mom had hers. Sam told my mom, "Clara Bell (Clara is my middle name, but Sam called me Clara Bell) is one of my best customers; she pays her bill on time every week." Mom insisted that since i did not have a job, i was not yet ready for the responsibility of having credit. What upset her most is that i had access to so much candy and sugar that she did not approve of. My sisters used to tell me, "you eat so much candy that you look sticky", but in my defense, i was not only buying sweets. There were times i bought certain fruit that We may not have had at home or sometimes i even bought tomatoes, or

some small toy! However, mom's word was final, and my credit line ended.

Isaiah was very ingenious and always found a way to have fun and earn money. He organized "The Little Stars", a neighborhood theater club. He wrote and directed plays, songs, and even trained his three younger siblings as well as neighborhood children to be performers. Kay was artistically talented - a story in and of itself. She is an extremely gifted seamstress, who had been sewing since she was about three or four years old. She designed and made our costumes as well as taught us dance steps. When she was a little girl, she spent a great deal of time with my paternal grandmother, Lucille Little. Lucille bought her needles and thread and gave her fabric to play around with which sparked her interest in sewing. Kay's sewing skills added just the right touch of brilliance to our performances.

We all helped my brother to rearrange our basement into a theater. There was a stage with audience seating, and even drawstring curtains to open and close during performances. We even offered candy and munchies for purchase by attendees. We had to work hard to earn the title of 'star'. Since i could not sing, i became an actress with my natural talent for acting. We rehearsed for each performance as professionals do. Together, We went throughout the neighborhood selling tickets to our shows, often wearing our dance costumes. As serious and dedicated as We were to our club, We rarely had a full house, probably because We were beautiful little Black children in a predominantly white neighborhood. During those days white folk usually did not often visit Black people's home, especially having been invited by little children. A few people, mostly family members and maybe friends of the family would come to support us, and We were encouraged and prideful of our efforts. While We enjoyed our theater club, as We aged, in-

terest waned thus the theater eventually folded, and only lasted two or three years.

Isaiah's creative ideas sometimes got us in trouble with my mom. One winter day, there was a major snowstorm with temperatures well below zero. Mom had the four of us younger children to stay home from school because she felt that there was too much snow for us to traverse through. Mom had to go on an errand and left the four of us at home. After my mom left, We decided to go out and play in the snow. Isaiah came up with the idea that We could build an igloo. He showed us how to pack snow into large, firm blocks. Isaiah had even drawn a blueprint for the igloo. It was fantastic! We made surround seating inside. Soon We had completed our igloo! We all went inside and sat down, and it was surprisingly comfortable. We were not cold at all. We were enjoying our little project, until mom returned home. She was livid! "i kept you home from school to keep you out of the snow, and i get home and you're sitting in a doggone snow house! Get in this house and change your clothes before you get sick! i am sure your clothes are wet after sitting in snow."

I was extremely active as a child. After school, Birda and i had piano lessons and modern dance. On Saturday, i attended modeling and ballet classes at Stoney's modeling School. During the summer Birda and i attended Vacation Bible School and a Catholic Day Camp even though We were raised as Baptists. If i was not at camp or Bible School, i was usually playing in the neighborhood with my friends. Mom would typically have me wear starched dresses with belts tied in the back. My friends usually wore pants in the summer or at any play time. It was a treat for girls to wear pants because pants were not allowed at school. Even in the cold of winter We were not allowed to wear pants. We could only wear them under our dresses, but We had to remove, and hang them in the coat

room once in school. One exception was a Native American girl who wore pants every day.

Overall, i had positive feelings about the people in the community with plenty of friends and adults who looked out for us. I recall one Caucasian girl named Helen from England who moved into our neighborhood. Since We had never met or been exposed to anyone from England, We thought that she "talked funny". The way she pronounced certain words was amusing to us, but that did not stop us from having fun with her. We accepted her speech and she enjoyed being with us. Helen's mom always gave out the best treats during Halloween. With their house being situated behind another house, most kids were afraid to go back there. However, since my friends and i were among the few kids who would go there, We were assured of plenty of goodies.

I developed a positive attitude about life in general! I believed that my elementary school was the best in town and had even bought into the idea that i lived in the 'greatest country in the world' which was largely based on limited knowledge of any other country. However, propaganda in this country was at its peak during the 50's and 60's and, just as most people, i accepted it all. I falsely believed that America was fair and just for all people – the best place anyone could possibly live. When reciting the "Pledge of Allegiance", i believed every word and presumed that this was "one nation, under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for all."

Growing older, i became acutely aware that my family was not perfect and that We shared some of the same problems as other families. I also began to become awakened to the harsh truth that this country was not the eutopia i had believed it to be. I was growing increasingly aware of some of the many fallacies as it relates to this "great country" and that in reality,

there was no "justice for all". In the larger scheme of things, i began to realize that Blacks were not treated as Americans. Obviously, i had lived a sheltered life and was looking at the world through the proverbial "rose colored glasses."

For most of my elementary school years, i attended Lloyd Street Elementary School in Milwaukee. When my siblings and i began classes, i was in first grade. The school was predominantly white but there was one Black teacher, Mrs. Yancey and a few Black children also attending. By the time i graduated from sixth grade, there were very few white students, as the school had become predominantly Black. The ugly reality of racism continued to unfold in my little world. The way some of the teachers acted, one could just feel the racism. My mom was seriously involved in the school since four of her children were students; Isaiah (Joe), Bernice, and Birda (Teen and Mic-ki), and me. Three older sisters attended junior high and senior high school. One teacher was mean to Birda, so mom had to confront her and eventually have Birda reassigned. Two years later i was scheduled in class with that same teacher. The teacher caught me talking and had me stand in the corner. Simply being in the corner was not enough for her though, she told me to kneel; to get on my knees. I stooped down, but i refused to get on my knees. Then she touched me with her foot and exclaimed, "that's not kneeling". I still refused to get on my knees because i did not feel that i should be on my knees for anyone. When i told my mom that the teacher had put her foot on me, Birda Mae (my mom) was "fit to be tied". The next morning mom accompanied me to school. The school principal stopped mom and me before We reached the classroom. Words were exchanged between the principal and mom and as We entered the classroom the principal stood between the teacher and mom as though mom would have possibly been physical with the teacher. The teacher denied everything, but my classmates overheard the conversation and stated that i was indeed telling

the truth. An unfortunate scene, but We got through it with no further issues with that teacher. Several other parents had encounters with that same teacher about her treatment of students, particularly Black children.

While i was generally happy and carefree as a child, certain elements in my environment forced me to seriously examine and reevaluate life for Black people. Gradually, exposure to racism as a youngster helped to prepare me for events to occur later in life at 1148 Lewis Street in Jackson, Mississippi.

Learning about Black history was basically a joke in elementary school. I can only recall one short paragraph in our Social Studies book along with an image of several enslaved Africans chained together at the neck as they are forcefully marched. Blatantly omitted was any information or reference to great achievements made by African people. Young people with absolutely no awareness of ourselves, our history, our greatness, and living in such a racist environment, is a breeding ground for self-hatred! Even throughout middle and high school there was limited information taught regarding our people. However, the cold harsh reality of increasing racial issues were the most important lessons for us. The rose colored glassed began to rapidly fade. Undoubtedly, one of the most devastating events in the news was the brutal desecration and murder of young Emmett Till in 1955. I clearly recall hearing adults discuss the events and how it appeared that nothing meaningful was being done as a result. Listening to adults was the necessary impetus for reassessment of my view of this 'great' country of ours.

Growing older and learning more about our people, some things seemed confusing to say the least. The Black community in Milwaukee was rather small and my contact with white people, after white flight, consisted mostly of teachers, a few

students, store clerks, and bill collectors. White residents of Milwaukee were not generally troubled or threatened by Black people at the time, but as the Black population increased, racism reared its ugly head! In school We were taught about all the wonderful things that America has done. Like how she has provided aid to other countries. Of course, the fact that aid was usually the ulterior motive and hypocritical key to exploitation of those countries was omitted from the narrative. One lesson in elementary school that i will never forget was all about the "horrors of Communism." Always eager to share the fruits of my learning with others, especially with my family, i went home after that lesson to tell of the horrible things that i learned about Communism. I emphasized my point by claiming, "i would rather die than to live in a Communist country" (yes, i was a bit dramatic in my youth)! Isaiah, who i loved dearly and had the utmost respect for replied, "i wouldn't say that if i were you. You have only heard one side of the story". I could not believe my ears. How could my dear brother say that? I was confused and hurt, yet i gave it much thought. I resisted the urge to argue the point and held back because he obviously had reasons for his position, and i certainly valued his opinion. Later, after continued growth and knowledge, i understood his sentiment. I came to the realization that there are several forms of government that are worthy of study and examination and not merely dismissed because someone has declared them to be invalid.

Some Black teachers did attempt to teach about our history and our plight, but the message was not always delivered with positive consequence. In middle school, one teacher of light brown complexion expressed to the class, her own version of why our people were so many shades or skin tones. She made references to sexual exploitation during our enslavement, and reconstruction. She displayed herself as an example of the result of those illicit sex acts, fair skin, small nose etc.

Turning to look at the class, she sarcastically stated, "but the darker ones, well We all know what happened with them." She laughed along with the children as they pointed and made derogatory remarks. Being of dark skin tone myself with unmistakably African features, i and a few others, bore the brunt of their misguided joking. I did not laugh! I sat in anger wondering why she so proudly boasted about the white blood that had so maliciously and savagely found its way into her veins. Black had been historically perceived with negative connotations. However, since most of my family was of dark complexion, Black was anything but derogatory. Mom taught us to love and respect ourselves. We clearly understood that our Blackness is a source of pride! I was utterly confused by my teacher's discussion. Eventually i would come to understand the extent of the psychological damage that effects our people. Self-hatred was alive and well, even though it was not always recognized as such.

Family Influenced My Thoughts!

While i only spent brief times with either of my grandmothers, i enjoyed the stories about my maternal grandmother, Hattie Kaya-Colbert, born in the late 1800s, and who was somewhat of a rebel in her own right. She understood our plight, that it was terribly dangerous for our people during those years; just living while Black put you in harm's way. Yet, my grandmother managed to maintain her dignity in the confines of that Jim Crow era. Black people did whatever menial work allowed, to earn money to provide for their families. Jobs included babysitting and cleaning house for white folks. Young black girls were often asked to babysit and were expected to accept when invited to do so. Well Hattie Kaya-Colbert never allowed my mom to babysit or do any other work for white folks that required extended time inside their homes. She was aware that young Black girls were not always safe in the homes of

white folk. There were reports of young Black girls and women subjected to rape and other harmful acts. My grandmother repeated horror stories that she either witnessed herself or were told to her. In reference to white folk, she would say, "they done, done everythang to us 'cept cooked us and ete us up." Hearing these types of stories helped in shaping my thoughts as well as to shape who i would become.

I am grateful that i did get to meet both of my grandmothers Hattie and Lucile. Lucile Little was my paternal grandmother. What i do know about her is that she was strong, endured a lot in the racist environment, and liked to drink to forget it all. I wish that i could have gotten to know her better. My Dad never spoke much about his history. As little as mom spoke regarding her history, she revealed much more than dad did and i knew more of my mom's relatives than my dad's. Dad's history may have been too painful for him to speak freely of. We know that he was raised by a stepfather who was not kind to him. Dad was made to work at a young age to help take care of his younger brothers and sisters. He lied about his age and enlisted in the army to escape the horrors of his home life.

Junior High School

Upon graduation from Lloyd Street Elementary School, i was enrolled in Roosevelt Junior High School. That was a fun time, especially lunch time. We had a full hour for lunch. Some students went home for lunch while others ate in the cafeteria. School lunch cost thirty-five cents, but often my friends and i would go to one of the restaurants on Walnut Street for lunch where hamburgers were only fifteen cents and a soda was ten cents, which left you with ten cents for candy or chips. Plus, the atmosphere of the restaurant was much more fun than the school cafeteria because there was music to dance to as We laughed and talked while We ate our lunch. Then close by was

the Potato Chip Factory where a big bag of potato chips and other goodies only cost five cents. Also close by was a Thrift Bakery where a variety of sweets were available for just a nickel or a dime. The options were seemingly endless. Our parents had no idea that We were spending our lunch money on junk. Life was certainly not all fun and games, however. There were significant lessons to be learned, not only in class, but in the world around us.

By the time i began Junior High school, my two oldest sisters in Milwaukee were married. So, for a few years, my parents had five teenagers, agers (13,15,16,18, and 19) living in the house at same time. When Kay got married, i was introduced to the Nation of Islam by Kay and her husband. They became Muslims, under the Hon. Elijah Muhammad. This was very empowering for me to begin hearing the positive words and messages about Black people! On one occasion my sisters Kay and Teen went to Chicago to hear the Messenger, the Honorable Elijah Muhammad speak. They returned from the Masque saying, "We are not Negroes, We are Asiatic Black men and women!" That sounded really cool to me, so i began using the term at school. At school i would boldly exclaim, "I'm not a Negro, I'm an Asiatic Black girl!" Of course, i was laughed at. My classmates would say, "yeah you black all right", which was intended negatively, as a joke, a "put down", but that did not stop me from using the term Black rather than Negro. I continued to say Black, but uncertain as to when or why i dropped the "Asiatic" and just said Black.

I credit the Nation of Islam as well as the total Black Power movement of that era with enlightening our people! I developed a clearer perspective of myself and my people. I became more conscious of the plight of Our people. A couple years later, i stopped eating pork because i was beginning to focus on my health. Muslim teachings greatly influenced my political

awareness too. Growing older, i became increasingly aware of the disparities between Black and white communities as it relates to economics, housing availabilities, employment opportunities, and other aspects of our lives. I developed a thirst for knowledge in general. I needed to know where We were as it relates to our existence in America. I realized that i knew so little about my history, and my desire for more information was intensified. I was on fire! I recall that in elementary school, our playmates were Black and a few whites. I never considered who We played with. I believe We were always subconsciously "race first", but We accepted whoever We had contact with. We were rarely, if ever, exposed to people of other nationalities. There were only white and Black people, for the most part. There was one little Brown girl, Jerri, who was from the Philippines. We knew that she was not white, and that she was clearly not just like us either, but she was readily accepted by all of us. The Black boys all went crazy over her.

Even when We did have Black teachers in elementary school, We were not taught to be proud of ourselves, our people, or our history. Yet, i could relate to the Black teacher's dilemma. In most cases, they had not been taught our people's history either, so they were not equipped to teach a new generation of Black students about our glorious African heritage. Black teachers often lacked the knowledge and understanding to stress to us how much We have given to the world. Nor did they stress the urgency of the fight for equality in the United States. They probably did not realize that there was something even bigger that We should have been fighting for, like sovereignty, freedom, and independence for African people globally. Most of them simply taught just as they had been taught, and that was from a white perspective. During those years We did not "step outside of the box". Black people simply did as We were told, believing that obedience and conformity would "get us out of the condition We were in". We desired to replicate the

thoughts, beliefs, and habits of our oppressors; to wear our hair like theirs; talk like them, act like them; laugh at their jokes -however unamusing. The predominant mindset and answer to our oppression was in total submission. To acquiesce and surrender to the dominant culture became our desire and objective as a means of survival; even if it meant that We put our people down, rather than lift them up. Some of our people really believed that "if it's white, it's right", but deep inside they had a burning desire for freedom for our people. They simply wanted to be accepted by the status quo. I realize that We live by what We are exposed to and what We are taught, and fortunately many of our people have been able to reach down in their soul and nurture what is innately at their core. They know that our ancestors were great, and built great civilizations, and that others came to learn at our universities; they understand our potential for greatness still exists. Our people began to look at other political avenues for our upliftment, such as separation, and other possibilities. They studied our history and many other political models.

The Civil Rights era was significant in our development. Black people had become "sick and tired of being sick and tired". We had been subjected to and endured a lengthy period of enslavement, emancipation, reconstruction, Jim Crow era, lynching's, being wrongfully convicted and imprisoned for trumped up charges or simply no charges whatsoever in acquiring our free labor. We sought equality in housing, job opportunities, justice within the legal system, quality schools and education for our children and more.

High school for me was basically the same as for most inner-city students with one tragic exception. The most painfully horrific experience of my life, at that point, occurred during my freshman year in high school. In April of that year, my brother, Isaiah was murdered just two houses from our home.

His job at the time was delivering coal (coal-burning furnaces provided heat to residential homes) to earn money for college. Isaiah was at the home of a customer to collect money for his delivery, when a man in the house was being very disrespectful to the family. Isaiah simply suggested that the man not disrespect this family as he was. The man suddenly turned and stabbed my brother to death! That really devastated my entire family. It was amazing that my parents survived my brother's death. The force of prayer and faith provided the strength to get our family through this most distressing time. As the only boy in the middle of eight girls, you can only imagine how special he was to all of us. Hurting and wounded, Birda (Micki) and i had to return to school. Birda graduated that June. I got through that difficult summer and returned to school in the fall. Involvement in school activities helped me through that period of painful loss. It was fun attending basketball and football games, proms, the 'snowball' and other dances. I had begun dating. I was escorted to the junior and senior proms with a young man who i would later marry. School years were not all fun and carefree, this was also during the time of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, who were both very impactful on the world, as well as on our young minds. We learned about marches, boycotts, sit-ins, doing for self, and standing up for what We believed in. Civil rights, self-determination, along with freedom and independence were popular topics of discussion and conversation. This was also the time of the Vietnam conflict, and the so-called "war on poverty". With the increasing number of issues in the news, the public outcry was beginning to express opposition to the status quo.

North Division High School where i was a student, was on the move! We were approved for a new school building, but with an increasing call for integration, the fear among Black residents was that white children would be bussed in to enjoy this beautiful new school, while Black students would be

bussed to an older building on the south side or another area. We did not know this to be fact, however, based on historical outcomes in these situations, We believed this to be the case for North Division High School. Black students and parents did not accept this idea at all. Meetings were held in protest of such a move. We fought to stay in the new building. I graduated before the opening of the new facility, but i was just as elated as everyone else when our beloved North Division remained a Black school!

While in high school, i began to take a more serious look at the world on other levels. Mickie and i started our 'hope chest' (a chest or box for collecting various items in preparation for your wedding day); although the practice of young ladies having a hope chest was pretty much outdated, We were excited to have ours. None of our friends had one, in fact i never knew anyone personally who had a hope chest. We used our allowance to purchase items for our hope chest. When it was time for marriage, We had everything that We needed except a house and furniture. We had dishes, pots and pans, blankets, sheets, etc. Mickie even had a beautiful set of fine China. Doris and Kay constantly teased us, saying, "poor things, spending all of their little money on things hoping that somebody will come along and marry them some day; i would be buying sharp clothes with that money." Mickie and i were kind of all-around girls, enjoying our teenaged years as well as preparing for our future.

After graduating from high school, i got a job for a few months, married my high school boyfriend, and moved to Indianapolis, Indiana. I had a big wedding; seven bride's maids, maid of honor, best man, seven ushers, ring bearer and flower girl. Most of my sisters and their husbands were in my wedding. Micki (Birda) was Maid of Honor and my nephew Marvin L. Marshal was Best Man. My niece and nephew Ronda

and Tyree (Teddy) were my ring bearer, and flower girl. Birda and i got married two weeks apart. Why not a double wedding? I have no idea! I was married two weeks after my nineteenth birthday and divorced at age 21. My former husband was in the Army and We only lived in Indianapolis for a few months before he was deployed to Germany. I returned home and began my college education, while my ex-husband was overseas. When he came home, he also returned to school. We lived together for about a year before the marriage ended in divorce, but We remained at the same university. Following my divorce, i concentrated on school. I did go on a few dates, but nothing serious. There was so much going on politically. These were turbulent times in the nation, especially for young people.

The mid to late sixties was a strange period in the nation. The conflict in Vietnam was still raging; people were protesting the war and other issues across the country. The concept of integration was increasing in some circles. Several anti-poverty programs were established in Black communities, which accounted for a great deal of the mixing of the races. There were uprisings on several college campuses, and even police shootings on both Black and white campuses. There were revolts on many levels; Hippies, Flower Children, and others were in opposition to "societal norms". Black people were fighting for better housing, better jobs and overall conditions and equality. Not everyone was fighting for integration. Significant numbers of us were striving for our basic human rights! African-American studies programs on campus provided an increased boost in our quest for knowledge of self. We were becoming more politically astute on an international scale. We learned of the struggles on the continent of Africa against colonialism. We learned of the circumstances of the imprisonment of Nelson Mandela, the murder of Patrice Lumumba and so many other atrocities against our people worldwide. Black groups were emerging across the nation, fighting for our equality, civil and

human rights, as well as for independence and sovereignty. Some of these concepts were new to me and i was indeed inspired by them. I wanted to know more. I wanted to become involved in creating a better life for our people. I wanted to become a part of the liberation movement. Black students were not only engaged in academics and party life, but actively participating in movements and conversations regarding our plight as a people.

My Life Was Changing

Hekima and i met three times before We began dating. Our first encounter was at a Christmas party that my sister Doris Griffin and i helped to organized for the "Inner city Development Project" (ICDP) on the north side of town at Third and Center Street. I was unaware that Hekima was the director of the center. There were ICDP offices throughout the city. At special times, centers would meet for events that would include various racial groups. The Christmas party was one of those special occasions. Hekima and my sister were playfully arguing, and i kept butting in, taking up for my sister, when Hekima just started dancing with me. A few months later, Hekima and i met at an off-campus student dance. We both attended the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM). Hekima was in graduate school while i was a sophomore. We talked and exchanged numbers but did not call each other. A few months later, We ran into each other once again at UWM-Madison campus at a Black Students Winter conference in 1969. It was at that conference that Hekima and i began "talking". A positive conference on many levels.

The object of the conference was to have discussions on various issues and concerns of Black students. One issue that i was passionate about was the relationship between brothers from the continent and the brothers and sisters here in the

states. There seemed to have been very few sisters from the continent on campus during the late sixties. It appeared that Brothers from the continent associated more with white students than with us. In addition, there were dating issues between the continental Brothers and the Sisters in the US. Participants in the conference shared their feelings and discussed the concerns as We observed them. A variety of solutions were offered to address some of the problems that affected our relationships. Overall, the conference was successful. Discussions facilitated the breaking down of some barriers, misconceptions, misunderstandings, and general issues that interfered with our ability to build strong, positive relationships with each other. After the conference We began hanging out together a lot more, partying together, studying together and just getting to know one another. There were also some very solid friendships that developed during and after that conference. There were other issues and concerns that were discussed at the conference as well, but our relationships with each other was more memorable.

Not only were Black students on campus seeking closer relationships with our Brothers and sisters from Africa, the Black community at large was also seeking understanding and cohesiveness. We recognized that We were all Brothers and Sisters. We highlighted our commonalities and worked toward our unification.

African ships would often arrive at the Lake Michigan dock in Milwaukee, and some of us would go aboard the ships just to socialize with the crews. One very memorable event for me is when i took my mom and nephew, Tyree Fowler, who was about 8 or 9 years old, for a tour of the ship. It was a wonderful experience! The Brothers served lunch, guided us on a tour of the ship and engaged in meaningful conversation with us. I feared that all the walking on the tour would be too stren-

uous on Mom, but i was so wrong! The 'girl' was high stepping! Mom was noticeably invigorated by the experience. She said, "well i guess this is the closest i will ever get to Africa." Soon, We observed a marked increase in the exchange of cultural interactions among our people. As interpersonal connections accelerated, relationships between continental Africans and Africans in America became more apparent We began to learn more about each other and recognize our common interests.

Introduction To the Republic of New Afrika

Hekima and i began dating following the UWM Black Students Winter conference. After We had been dating for a few months, i was visiting him at his apartment and overheard him on a conference call. When i got back home, i told my roommate, Carolyn Reams about the call. "Girl, it was something about Republic of Africa, but i didn't know what it was about. i do know that it sounded really interesting". I later learned that the conversation was referring to the Republic of New Afrika. Hekima eventually told me all about the RNA, then about a Month later i accompanied him and others to a conference in Ithaca, New York. One of the speakers was Dr. John Henrick Clark at Cornell University. That was such a powerful conference, yet all of this was new to me. There was extensive discussion of the Republic of New Africa.

1."In the late 1960s, a convention of Black delegates met in Detroit, Michigan and proclaimed that Black people in the United States were in fact a Nation of People separate from the American people. Delegates included Imari Obadele (later elected president of the Black Nation) who gave that Nation of People a name, the Republic of New Afrika. The Republic of New Afrika took the concept of Black Nationhood to its ultimate stage when, in 1968, it declared Black People to be free and independent of the United States government.

The Republic of New Afrika declared Black People's independence because they believe that:

Black People in Amerikkka make up a nation of people, a people separate and apart from the Amerikkkan people. The RNA also believes that as a nation of people, We are entitled to all of the rights of a nation, including the right to land and self-determination. The RNA further believes that all the land in Amerikkka, upon which Black People have lived for a long time, worked and made rich as slaves, and fought to survive on is land that belongs to Us as a people, and it is land We must gain control of because, as Malcolm X said, land is the basis of independence, freedom, justice and equality. We cannot talk about self-determination without discussing it within the context of land. Therefore, the RNA [identifies the five states of Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina as Black People's land] believes that gaining control of our land is the fundamental struggle facing Black People. Without land, Black Power, rights and freedom have no substance."

Author unknown (taken from a set books.com/...Republic of New Afrika)

New Afrikan News Letter (specific Auther unkown)

Hekima finally introduced me to some brothers and sisters of the Republic of New Afrika and i loved all that i was hearing from them! Later he took me to a national meeting, the People's Center Counsel meeting (PCC) in Detroit, Michigan. There, i met so many fantastic, intelligent, loving, dedicated, and serious brothers and sisters including President, Brother Imari Obadele, Sister Johari Halisi and Brother Chokwe Lumumba, who would later become Mayor of Jackson, Mississippi. I was completely enamored with the RNA. It was as though my total mind, body and soul had been transformed; exactly what i had been searching for my entire life! My sister, Kay Fowler used to tease me when i would say, "i got to find myself!" Her response would be, "girl you haven't found yourself

yet? Every time i see you, you're looking for yourself." When i became involved with the brothers and sisters in the RNA i no longer had to look for myself. The RNA citizens spoke of acquiring land, of obtaining reparations and ideas and some concepts i had never considered. For Black people to have the gall to entertain such thoughts, was perceived by white people as an affrontive behavior. Whites were unprepared to hear Black people expressing ideas such as acquiring land, separating from America, seeking reparations, protecting themselves or openly fighting back against oppression! They could not understand why in the world Black people would desire "self-determination!" It was never expected that white people would understand our struggle; it was outside of their realm of understanding. Even many Black people were unable to relate to Our ideas and goals. The RNA's mission was establishment of a territory where We could be safe from police brutality, the KKK and other hate groups who inflicted all manner of misery upon Black people. At long last i had finally found myself! i had arrived!

At RNA meetings and gatherings, We recited the New Afrikan Pledge and Creed. For me, the expression was spiritual and i internalized every word.

The New Afrikan pledge

For the fruition of Black power, for the triumph of Black nationhood, i pledge to the Republic of new Afrika, and to the building of a better people and a better world, my total devotion my total resources and the total power of my mortal life.

The New Afrikan Creed

I believe in the spirituality, humanity and genius of Black People, and in Our new pursuit of these values.

I believe in the family and the community and in the community as a family and i will work to make this Concept live.

I believe in the community as more important than the individual.

I believe in constant struggle for freedom to end oppression and build a better world. I believe in collective struggle: in fashioning victory in concert with my brothers and sisters.

I believe that the fundamental reason Our oppression continues is that We as a people lack the power to control Our lives.

I believe that the fundamental way to gain that power, and end oppression, is to build a sovereign Black nation.

I believe that all the land in America, upon which We have lived for a long time, which We have worked and built upon, and which We have fought to stay on, is land that belongs to Us as a people.

I believe in the Malcolm X doctrine: that We must organize upon this land, and hold a plebiscite, to tell the world by vote that We are free and Our land independent, and that, after the vote, We must stand ready to defend Ourselves, establishing the nation beyond contradiction.

Therefore, i pledge to struggle without cease, until We have won sovereignty. I pledge to struggle without fail until We have built a better condition than the world has yet known.

I will give my life is that is necessary. I will give my time, my mind, my strength and my wealth because this is necessary.

I will follow my chosen leaders and help them.

I will love my brothers and sisters as myself.

I will steal nothing from a brother or sister, cheat no brother or sister, misuse no brother or sister, informed on no brother or sister and spread no gossip.

I will keep myself clean in body, dress and speech, knowing that i am a light set on a hill, a true representative of what We are building.

I will be patient and uplifting with the deaf, dumb and blind, and i will seek by word and deed to heal the Black family, to bring into the movement and into the community, mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters left by the wayside.

Now, freely and of my own will, i pledge this creed, for the sake of freedom for my people and a better world, on pain of disgrace and banishment if i prove false. For i am no longer deaf, dumb or blind. I am - by the inspiration of Our ancestors and the grace of Our Creator - a New Afrikan. (dated 1969 with changes approved as of 5, May 1993)

New Afrikan News Letter (specific Auther unkown)

Those words meant so much to me! I believed in the people and all that they represented. It was my desire to be a part of

that! I thought very highly of President, Brother Imari Obadele and believed him to be "a man among men" who dedicated his life to the empowerment of Black people. For me, it was an honor to be in his presence. The RNA had North, South, East, and West regional vice presidents. Hekima was the first vice president, first in line to the presidency. He was very dedicated and committed to our struggle. His dedication to our people was impressive (and a turn on, I might add). RNA Brothers and Sisters were so sincere. When reciting the Creed or Pledge, the combined energy and united roar of those heartfelt voices could often bring you to tears!

There were RNA governmental centers or consulates in several cities including the one We opened in Milwaukee. Hekima began conducting nation building classes in his apartment and other locations before We finally rented a space on Fond du Lac and North Avenue for classes and other Government work. We shared our space with other 'conscious' groups such as the Milwaukee chapter of "The Black People's Topical Research Center." Kwanzaa celebrations became a tradition in our building as well. Our location was near a popular night club called the "Satin Doll". On the night of December 31, 1970, We were preparing to celebrate the Kwanzaa principle of Kuumba (Creativity) as party goers were entering the club ready to bring in the new year dressed in their finest attire. Several of us RNA citizens intercepted couples and individuals hoping to convince them to come hear our message rather than going to party. They were not rude to us, but they had partying on their minds. A few stopped only briefly to listen and even engaged us in conversation, then promised to come back at another time. We were serious about RNA goals and mission, and invested numerous hours at our location with meetings, lectures, and Nation Building Classes where the community was always welcomed.

In the summer of 1970, Hekima and i attended a meeting in Detroit, Michigan. Unbeknownst to us, there was an African naming ceremony conducted by Brother Chokwe Lumumba who bestowed upon us our African names. I became Tamu Sana and Hekima became Hekima Ana. Hekima later chose Kanyama as a last name. On October 1, 1970, Hekima and i moved in together under the principle of what was termed 'Black Law' marriage. Our position was that We did not require permission of the dominant culture to consider ourselves "married" – a form of Self Determination. I don't know how Hekima and i had the nerves, the audacity, the unmitigated gall to explain to my mother about our plans to live together under Black Law marriage. I was a traditional type, so a Brother was supposed to ask for my hand in marriage, if he wanted me. So, We did it! I know that mom neither approved nor understood this entirely new marriage concept, being old fashioned, and i was her baby. I wish i knew what was really going through her mind. I am not certain what her reaction was. I just recall wanting to get out of the house as fast as i could. She grilled us with several questions about this new way of thinking, but she finally gave her consent. We proceeded to move in a house, not far from my mom's home. My oldest nephew who was a few years my senior, Robert Biddle and his mate Drusilla moved in with us for a few months; it was a nice little set up.

When Hekima and i began our lives together, i was still attending the University of Wisconsin and Hekima was Director of the "Inner City Development Project", Malcolm X Center on the North Side. We both worked tirelessly on RNA projects. I supported his efforts to organize in Milwaukee and his national responsibilities as well. I even bested him in sales of our newspaper. I usually accompanied him on out-of-town travels. I learned a lot from my participation in the Republic of new Afrika. I learned more about our history and our struggles since We were encouraged to continually read and study.

Whatever i learned, i shared with anyone who dared to listen to me, especially my family. My nephews and nieces really gravitated to the information that i shared. The older members of my family listened but figured i was only "going through another phase". I also understand that they were concerned for my welfare and safety.

Land Celebration

It was the position of the RNA that because Black people have worked on as well as fought to live on various lands in America for a long time, that this land belongs to us as a people. However, We only claimed five states in the deep south - Alabama, Louisiana Mississippi, Georgia and South Carolina. We believed that one day after consistent hard work and strategic planning that We would "Free the Land"! But until such time, the RNA officials felt it necessary to secure a plot of land, that We owned. Thus, the RNA initiated the process of purchasing land near Bolton, Mississippi to begin building the "new community". They felt that it was important to establish a land base in Mississippi. A Black farmer, Lofton Mason agreed to sell his property to the RNA despite being harassed and threatened by local whites. This newly purchased land was to serve as the New Afrikan Capital. The excitement generated by the prospect of land ownership was cause for a celebration!

Plans were under way for a "Land Celebration" in March of 1971. We were preparing to experience an exhilarating weekend. Most of us traveled from various states to attend the celebration. We poured into Mississippi by air and land conveyance, dressed primarily in blue jean suits and black turbans. Filled with excitement and pride, We had come to celebrate our accomplishments and our potential for Black nationhood.



We met at a specified location to await the arrival of other RNA members. There were news reporters attempting interviews and local spectators. After everyone was assembled, the journey began to our destination, "The Land" in a caravan of cars. As We peacefully traveled on our way, We were confronted by a barricade of police vehicles. We stopped as directed by police. Brother Chokwe Lumumba got out to speak with the officers and the barricade was immediately removed and the caravan proceeded. Upon arrival to our land, We were faced with a sign on the gate "Won't be no meeting here Sunday nigger Free 6' hole", signed, 'KKK'. The sign neither frightened nor deterred us and We moved right along.

The beautiful celebration included meetings and even a wedding, but the main event was the establishment of our capital! The flag was raised, and El Malik was established! We were all so happy and so proud. We were making plans and discussing possibilities for use of the land, who would reside there, the first building constructed, etc. Unfortunately, our joy was brief. When the weekend was ended and We returned to our respective homes, We later learned that the land deal had not materialized! The pressure to not sell his property to the RNA was a bit much for Lofton Mason and he reneged on the deal.

That was a crushing blow, but understandable as it relates to circumstances and prevalent attitudes of Mississippi in 1971. The struggle continued.

Although unsuccessful in purchase of the land, We continued our work in Mississippi. One RNA Government center was located on Lynch Street near the campus of Jackson State College and another residence at 1148 Lewis Street that was residence for several of our citizens. Brothers and Sisters at the RNA Government Center engaged in National Government work as other RNA citizens were organizing in the general community. Basically, community organizing involved personal introductions as well as the RNA philosophy to people in the community, thereby establishing a rapport. Several RNA citizens relocated, often entire families, to Mississippi from northern cities to assist in building efforts. These committed Brothers and Sisters and their family members made the move to Mississippi despite the possible dangers in unfamiliar territory.

Black People's Top Center And Other Events

I was so excited to be introduced to the "Black People's Topographical Research Center" (Top Center) in Chicago. I felt that their information, and ideas complimented the ideol-ogies of the Republic of New Afrika. I was so impressed that i began taking people to Chicago to hear lectures as often as possible. The Top Center housed an enormous collection of information relative to our people the world over. The primary lecture focused on information that related to Black people in America. Upon entering the Top Center, you were greeted by a staff member who would offer a tour throughout the facility.

Large maps of major US cities were displayed on the walls together with other sources of information that was readily available. A variety of lecture topics were based on our past and present conditions and how vulnerable We were to whims and policies of the dominant society. Lectures were frequently laced with self-help, self-determination by offering solutions and plans for necessary actions to save ourselves from possible destruction. So powerful were the lectures that i was filled with an urgent desired for every Black person of the Diaspora to hear them and be inspired by the insight. So much was being revealed about our present predicament and exactly what must be done to effect change. I must confess that as serious as i was about our plight, i was still doing my share of partying. Caro-lyn Reams, and i frequently traveled to Chicago to party and to visit her relatives, but We always made time to visit the Top Center.⁴⁵ I had to satisfy my unquenchable thirst for learning as

much as i could about our people. Mine was a perpetual search for information regarding African people.

My Trip to Ghana West Africa

In the summer of 1971, UWM (University of Wisconsin) facilitated an opportunity for students to participate in a program with the American Forum to travel to Africa. I was elated! I had never dreamed of traveling to Africa, but here was my opportunity to visit Ghana to study at the University of Accra, Legon, West Africa. My Mom provided financial assistance for my trip. The experience was most enlightening! I enjoyed every minute. It truly felt like home. I loved being with the people and learning about the culture. The food was magnificent, and i adored purchasing the clothes. We studied hard during class where We learned more of our history and We partied hard on the weekends. Classes were intense and filled with information that We had to digest in just a short period of time. I was fortunate enough to visit and spend the night in one of the homes where i was informed that Kwame Nkruma used to stay when he studied. I was also able to sit in on a session of Parliament. It was delightful to see everyone dressed in their finest African attire, draped in traditional Kente Cloth etc. The only puzzling sight was Africans wearing white British style wigs. Overall, the extraordinary visit was the experience of a lifetime!

My travel group ventured about, just having a good time and enjoying the cultural sights. At one nightclub i danced so hard that i was declared winner of a dance contest. My prize was a dozen quarts of Star beer. My friends and i enjoyed that beer. We visited the grave of W. E. B. Dubois along with other historically relevant sites. No trip to Ghana would be complete without a visit to the notorious El Mina Castle (i call it El Mina dungeon). Such a devastating moment for me! Per instructions of the tour guide, any female on their cycle was asked not to

enter due to possible unpleasant consequences. As luck would have it, i was on my cycle, but i did not listen. Not sure if i was embarrassed to admit that i was on my cycle or if i was simply determined to see the dungeon. The experience of being in the dungeon invoked a plethora of feelings and emotions. Most of all i remember feeling terribly sad. Many people were crying; some ran out, unable to bear the experience. It was extremely emotional, as the tour guide described in detail the horrific sufferings and fates of our people who entered the "door of no return." - so named because captured Africans who were forced through the door of El Mina Castle, were never again to experience life as they had known it; never to return.

My group and i got along well with the Ghanaian students; however, it became apparent that some continental Africans knew little or nothing about the history of Africans in America. They had no knowledge of the extent of pain and suffering that We had endured or the reality of our struggles today. A popular belief, among a few, was that We were all financially wealthy and that We should be grateful to be Americans. On the other hand, there were many students who We connected with on our global issues as African People. One of my professors at UWM, before our trip personally recommended that i not go over there "talking politics". However, We engaged in numerous serious political discussions regarding the plight of our people, our history, and expectations for the future. A momentous trip indeed!

It was great to get back to family and friends to share with them all that i had learned. Immediately upon exiting the plane, i had to show off a little bit of what i learned in Africa. I had learned to balance a large basket on my head and walk with it. Newspaper journalists and photographers were there to take pictures and to welcome us back home. Everyone was excited to have us back and to hear our stories.

Hekima and i had begun experiencing problems in our relationship. In spite of the obvious problems, while in Africa i purchased an Ashanti stool, a wooden replica of the traditional golden stool of African kings. I purchased one for my "King" (We referred to our mates as our kings and they referred to us as their queens) and hand carried it on the plane all the way home.

Prior to my departure for Ghana, Hekima and i were not on good terms. Upon my return, i found evidence of another female having been in my bedroom, so i knew that this would be the end of our relationship. What Hekima was not aware of (until the moment he reads this book), was that i had also met someone who i had become interested in. Hekima was not gifted with the Ashanti stool because, in my mind, his behavior was not that of a king, definitely not my king! I put the stool in the closet where it would remain until I presented it to him about ten years later. We were really breaking up. In actuality, the unfortunate chain of events saved our marriage; in fact, put us back together. I had faced the harsh reality that our break-up was inevitable and that We would go our separate ways. However, We had planned a trip south upon my return from Africa, so We proceeded with our plans despite our troubled relationship and my family's disapproval.

Having maintained a close relationship with my nieces and nephews, three of my little nieces strongly disapproved of my plans to visit Mississippi. My nieces, Ronda Vaughn, Michelle Harris-Taylor and Jill Strickland-Denson - ranging in age from 5 to 9 - met to discuss my Mississippi trip. Having met, they informed me that their decision was that i should not go to Mississippi. I have no idea the source of their thoughts or what prompted their decision. I expressed to them how sweet it was for them to be concerned about me, that i loved them, and that i would be fine as i travel to Mississippi. Surprisingly,

they began crying almost hysterically. I desperately attempted to console them. They finally stopped crying but remained adamant that i should not go to Mississippi. Later, i was told that my niece's behavior might have been a warning for me. Something i had to consider, given their dramatic display of distress about my journey to Mississippi.

As awkward as the situation was, Hekima and i embarked as planned. Our itinerary included a visit to Hekima's mom, Olivia McClure in Charlotte, North Carolina, then on to the RNA government center in Jackson, Mississippi, then to Georgia to visit my sisters, Eula Mae Greene, Hattie M. Biddle and their families. Two of my nieces, Lillie B. Wells (Baby Doll) and Clara Peeples (Peggy Lee) traveled with us as far as North Carolina, then continued to Georgia. Hekima and i remained in North Carolina for a few days, then on to Mississippi which was as far as we got.

Events in Mississippi

We arrived at the government center/Headquarters of the Republic of New Afrika in Jackson, Mississippi and were warmly greeted by the Brothers and Sisters. We were informed that the house was historical because it had been occupied by CORE (Congress on Racial Equality) and SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) and now served as Government Center /Headquarter for the Republic of New Afrika. Hekima and i were to lodge at another RNA Government Center at 1148 Lewis Street which was a few blocks away. Briefly visiting with Brothers and Sisters on Lynch Street, Hekima and i proceeded to go to the Lewis Street location. Again, We were eagerly greeted by RNA citizens, both those We had not seen in a while as well as meeting others. All was going well with our visit until the second morning. To declare that "all hell broke loose" would be an understatement!

Just before dawn on August 18, 1971, We were awakened by a loud, unidentified voice speaking through a bullhorn and demanding that We all exit the house. Suddenly and without warning, a barrage of bullets and tear gas canisters pierced the silence and peace of the morning that We had so enjoyed only seconds prior. According to police and FBI reports, We were allowed only 75 seconds to wake up, get dressed, and exit the house before bullets and tear gas canisters were fired. Hekima and i jumped out of bed; I grabbed a spring coat that i had brought with me. I did not have time to get dressed or to get my shoes. Hekima was able to get his pants on but no shirt, no shoes. Bullets and tear gas poured into the small wood framed house. There was an exchange of gunfire. While We were non-violent, We did believe in self-defense. Sister Njeri Quaduss, who happened to have been pregnant, and i were the only two female occupants. The moment was chaotic as the room filled with tear gas canisters and bullets flying, glass breaking, plaster fell from ceilings and walls, and everyone just out of bed grabbing any clothing they could. It was like a horror film. We had no idea who was shooting at us. Possibly the KKK or some other white hate group whose terroristic activities against Black people were still prevalent and against our mission and goal of Black nationhood.

We were vaguely familiar with Mississippi's history. We had heard of the horrendous attacks and murders of "Freedom Riders" only ten years prior to our own ordeal. We were oblivious to what was happening or who was responsible for this assault. We learned much later that white racists were observed in the area earlier that morning. While incarcerated at Parchman in Camp 8, Brother Addis Ababa said a white Sergeant told him that he had been there that morning and that he was neither a police officer nor FBI agent. If that Sargent was there, then most likely there were others present who were not law enforcement personnel. None of us had warrants. Police had

no prior information relative to arms violations at RNA facilities. We had broken no laws. our singular reality was that We were being unjustifiably assaulted!

Amidst the chaos and uncertainty, Brother Chuma, who was maybe 16 or 17, years old, seemed to have appeared out of nowhere and grabbed Sister Njeri and me to guide us to an underground tunnel. An opening in a closet floor led to a large hole in the ground, a tunnel that must have been about 4 feet deep. When Chuma had gotten us into the tunnel, he attempted to climb back into the house to retrieve his gun, but he slipped and fell back into the tunnel. I believe that fall must have been the result of divine intervention! Having fallen, he saw me scrambling from under the house, he grabbed my foot and, pulled me back into the tunnel. Though unable to say with certainty, i suppose that i was in a state of shock and imagined that i saw light and was moving toward that light. Had i suc-ceeded in reaching that light at the front of the house, i am certain that i would have been riddled with bullets! I would not have survived. When Chuma fell back into the tunnel, after rescuing me, he covered us with his body to shield us from bul-lets and tear gas canisters. An unforgettable moment. I become emotional simply recalling it. Young Chuma did not hesitate; he was prepared to sacrifice his own life to save our lives. Hav-ing committed his life to Black empowerment, Brother Chuma would have died for his beliefs. Our Brothers were well dis-ciplined and well trained by RNA Minister of Defense, Baba Alajo Adegbalola. I am always in awe when hearing Brothers and Sisters describe the rigorous training that they endured under the guidance of Brother Alajo. Alajo's daughter, Sister Fulani Sunni-Ali and Sister Kahina Ghafoor-shabazz said that i escaped the vigorous training because i didn't live in the Na-tional Territory (the five states that we claimed). Brother Alajo was tough, strong, dedicated and a disciplined master!

Confronted by horrendous challenges, yet We were all alive. The other Brothers joined us in the tunnel as gunfire continued for a few minutes. Hekima looked out and observed that our attackers were uniformed police officers. He shouted to the Brothers that given the presence of an army of law enforcement, our ideal option was to surrender. Brothers yelled out to those We recognized to be officials "stop! hold your fire! Stop shooting We are coming out!" We walked out with our hands up, leaving our "safe place" to find 35 police and FBI personnel armed with an arsenal of weapons, tear gas guns, bulletproof vests, gas masks, an armored personnel carrier borrowed from Shelby County, Tennessee and reportedly the same carrier that James Earl Ray, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr's assassin was transported in. Also on site was a Thompson tank and an ambulance. Obviously prepared for all-out war, the army of 35 even had snacks to enjoy as if attending a picnic (a/k/a, "pick a nigga").

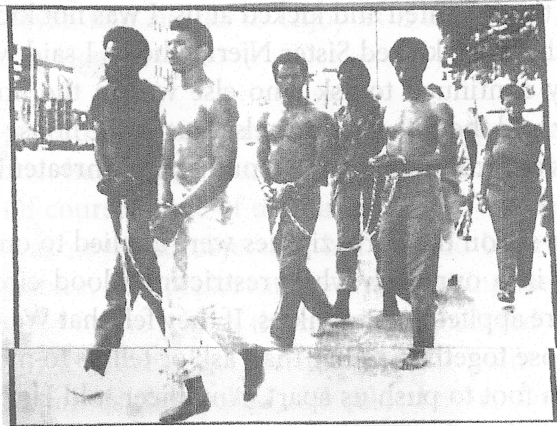
We were stunned to learn that one FBI agent, and two police officers, had been wounded, one of whom was fatally wounded. Of course, none of us wanted this to happen. Confrontation was never an objective, but We did believe in the first law of nature, self-preservation. Upon exiting the premises, We were led to the rear of the house and ordered to lay on the ground. The officers were irritated to the point of foaming at the mouth as they yelled and cussed at us. One officer pressed his foot on the Brothers' shoulders while questioning, "who fired an automatic weapon?", simultaneously increasing pressure with his foot. An officer asked Brother Karim why he came to Mississippi, as he held a gun to his back saying, "you'll never see another day of life". I attempted to lay my head on the ground as i had been ordered to do, but realizing the presence of bugs, i jerked my head up and an officer placed his gun to my face and told me to put my Goddamn head down or he would blow my Goddamn brains out. So, i placed my head

close to the ground, but i just couldn't lay my head down on those bugs. I realized later, that my life could have ended due to my fear of bugs. We laid there as they seemingly incessantly questioned and shouted at us. After laying on the grown for what seemed like hours, We were ordered to stand on our feet. Next, We were led to the front of the house and ordered to sit on the street curb.

Brother Offagga was the last one of us in the back of the house, and one officer said "We ought to shoot this nigger back here". While at the front of the house, another officer had pointed a gun at him and shouted, "I'll blow your wig". They constantly yelled for Bro. Imari, saying, "Imari Obadele get out of that house, We know you're in there". They continued to fire their weapons and tear gas canisters into the house. All the while, they shouted and kicked at us. I was not kicked, but i learned that they kicked Sister Njeri, who as I said was pregnant. They continued to ask who else was in the house. We repeatedly told them that no one else was in the house but they ignored us and continued with shouting and threatening us.

As We sat on the curb, zip ties were applied to our wrists, which cut into our flesh while restricting blood circulation. Chains were applied to our ankles. If they felt that We were sitting too close together, rather than ask or tell us to move over, they used a foot to push us apart. An officer told Hekima and Addis that if they ever come to Jackson again that he would kill them. As this was happening, the officers continued to interrogate the Brothers, striking them in the head with their gun barrels, shouting that they better talk! Every other word was "nigger" this and "nigger" that, and "MF-ing nigger". One officer asked Brother Addis, why he came to Mississippi, then told him, "you won't leave alive"! There was constant harassment, and repeated threats to kill us. Officers held guns to the Brother's heads provoking several answers under extreme duress.

When questioned as to who he had been shooting at, Brother Offagga, upset after witnessing his pregnant wife being kicked, responded that he fired at anything white that he saw moving. His response noticeably incensed them. We were subjected to an unending barrage of threats and harassment. When the police van arrived, We were ordered to get in, then subjected to tear gas the entire ride. One Brother told us to hold our heads down in an effort to ease the agony of the teargas. When the van finally stopped and We were ordered out, all of us were paraded through the streets of Jackson Mississippi, shackled and handcuffed as We were led to the Jackson city jail. A photo of us paraded through the streets in chains, closely resembles photos of our ancestors who were changed and marched through the streets to auction blocks to be sold.



Support for us Came Quickly

Thankfully, several Black attorneys came to our aid. Perhaps it was the attorneys who contacted our parents, or they may have seen the incident broadcast on the news. The event was aired on local, national and international news. As you might imagine our families were distraught, to say the least. Parents and loved ones alike headed to Mississippi. Hekima's

mom was first on the scene. My mom sent my sisters, Doris Griffin and Kay Fowler. It was comforting to see our family members who all realized the gravity of our situation, yet, We might not have had a total grasp at that moment and the level of danger We were facing. I was not fearful. I felt mostly anger that We had been attacked, and our lives disrupted.

The FBI as well as the Jackson police had set us up. It was clear that they did not intend for any of us to see the light of another day or walk the streets as "free" human beings. Their alleged motive for attacking our government center is that they were looking for a fugitive by the name of Sylee. The so-called fugitive, Sylee had joined the RNA in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and later traveled to Mississippi, to the government center; but had been suspended from participating in any RNA activities and placed on probation. Not sure of the circumstances regarding Sylee's probation, but RNA requirements were that citizens adhere to strict behavioral rules and guidelines. Perhaps Sylee violated RNA policy.

The FBI had their spy, Snoopy, otherwise known as Tom Spells who infiltrated the RNA by joining and becoming a citizen in Milwaukee to keep tabs on everything that We were doing. Spells reported all plans and activities to police and the FBI as well as fabricated information. Police and the FBI were aware that Sylee joined the RNA Milwaukee Consulate. They knew of his whereabouts for months; His place of residence and meetings he attended but made no move to arrest him. Snoopy had informed the FBI of Sylee's travel to Mississippi, his arrival at the Center and of Sylee's suspension from the RNA. Sylee could simply have been arrested without incident. It was also revealed that for several months; the RNA Government Center had been under surveillance. Despite repeated opportunities to arrest Sylee without endanger to anyone, police and FBI deliberately waited for a situation with the possibility of numer-

ous casualties. The questions must be asked! Why a predawn raid on the morning of August 18, 1971 in search of Sylee? Why so many law enforcement personnel? Why a Thompson tank and ambulance? All of this was done in an attempt to arrest one person is ludicrous! I think, that they believed that Brother President Imari, Hekima and others in leadership positions would be at the same place at the same time, affording them the perfect time to attack! The Police and the FBI were aware of Sylee's whereabouts and again i state without reservation that We were set up for "the kill" yet forces outside of their realm of understanding - the Almighty and the ancestors were on our side.

We were so fortunate to have survived the shootout and an even greater miracle that We were not murdered while in custody. In that same chain of thought, how marvelous a miracle that We did not all get the death penalty. Every opportunity was presented for our lives to be taken. We could have been executed when exiting the house via the tunnel, while in the police van, or at any time while in custody. I proclaim that it had to have been divine intervention. I give thanks to the Creator and the ancestors for protecting us. It was obvious that the police and FBI had come to annihilate us, for they had no other reason to have been at our Government Center. We were truly in "the lion's den"! But God was in control!

Lynch Street Headquarters

The RNA facilities were searched during and after our arrest. A bomb squad was deployed. As police and FBI attacked the RNA 1148 Lewis Street Center, there was a simultaneous attack being carried out at the Lynch Street Headquarters. Fortunately, RNA citizens at the Lynch Street location were already awake and active, able to comply with the order to vacate. There was peaceful interaction, no fugitive present, no

one wanted for any broken law and no exchange of gunfire. Yet they were arrested for a variety of trumped-up charges just as those of us at 1148 Lewis Street. Overall charges ranged from murder, attempted murder, conspiracy, waging war against the state of Mississippi, treason, possession of an automatic weapon and other charges. There were seven of us at 1148 Lewis street and four people at the Lynch street facility. Collectively, We were known as the RNA 11. All charges were bogus; We were asleep when suddenly attacked and there was no incident at Lynch street at all, so clearly there should have been no arrest there, which means that all charges were fabricated.

Reality of our Situation Began to set in

When i first entered the jail cell at Jackson City Jail and that metal door slammed shut behind me, i was suddenly faced with a very new and different reality! I realized that i could not go anywhere, i had to remain where i was, and do whatever i was told to do. I had limited control of my situation. I did not cry; i was just stunned. I felt numb, like "is this for real"? The jail cell was tiny with a toilet, sink and a metal bed attached to the wall, with an extremely thin mattress. I had never seen the inside of a jail. I was alright however because i had my Sisters, Sister Njeri Quaddus (Toni Auston) and Sister Aisha Saleem (Brenda Blount) with me. We kept each other upbeat; spirits high. Occasionally, We would see the Brothers in rare moments they would bring us together. When We did see the Brothers, We were bursting with excitement, even though most times We were only being moved from one jail to another. We were in the city jail for about two weeks then moved to Hinds County jail. The Sisters and i were placed in the last cell in the cellblock. Larger than the previous space, it was designed for four people. There was a toilet, sink and shower that had no shower curtain and four metal beds with thin mattresses. We used a sheet as a shower curtain. We were in Hinds County for

about two weeks or so, then transferred to Parchman Penitentiary. We were excited when We moved to Parchman because We were able to ride all the way there with the Brothers. We were unaware of the ghastly reputation of Parchman. It was known for being a place where many people went in and never came out!

Parchman had small cells, each with a toilet, sink and one metal bed, like the City Jail. We were in individual cells but the three of us Sisters were in side-by-side cells, so We could readily communicate with each other. We were permitted to leave our cells twice each week for about an hour, to shower and exercise. We kept our spirits up by staying focused on our beliefs. There were local Brothers in cells on the other side of the wall who We communicated with as well. They had heard about the RNA and appeared to have been excited to be in the same prison with us. We spoke with them daily and We could hear each other clearly. They wanted to know all about the Republic of New Afrika. We held nation building classes and taught them the New African Creed and Pledge which was recited each morning. Increasing in confidence, We chanted, "the land will be free in '73" (1973). The land that We referred to was the five states, mentioned earlier. (We believed that, that land belonged to us as a people but it was in captivity). The RNA slogan, "Free the Land" was our standard greeting and departure phrase and remains today among those of us in the 'New Afrikan community. We never experienced any level of depression nor fear or powerlessness. Our positive outlook was born of the belief that We were a righteous people with a righteous cause and that victory was certain! We had actually convinced those Brothers, and ourselves that We would indeed "be free in '73". Although physically on lock down, We were mentally free and unrestricted.

We were examined by a doctor while at Parchman. The prison doctor was a Spanish-speaking man and fortunately for us, Sister Aisha was fluent in Spanish. The doctor appeared to have been pleased to have someone to communicate with in his native language. As Aisha and the doctor engaged in lengthy and pleasant conversations, the guards did not appreciate the fact that the two were able to converse in a language that they could not understand. In response to the reaction of the guards, Sister Njeri and i created our own pseudo-language just to annoy them. We would speak in our private dialogue whenever a guard was present. One female matron asked, "are y'all talking in Afri- can? Stop that! Stop that!" We laughed and continued with our 'conversation'. They had no idea what We were saying and quite honestly neither did We.

Often, matrons would make futile attempts at engaging us in conversation, hoping to sound humane and have us open up to them and possibly extract information. One Matron, while trying to chat with us asked "why yall call them yo Brothers? They ain't yo brothers if they yo husbands. You wouldn't sleep with yo Brother, would you?" We had learned to always ignore them and not respond unless necessary. We never got to see the Brothers at all until the day We left Parchman. We were confined in the maximum-security unit at Parchman for several weeks, then transferred back to Hinds County jail in Jackson for Our hearings. We had an opportunity to be with the Brothers on the trip back, so all was well. Even at this point, i still did not comprehend just how perilous our situation was. I suppose the full impact of reality was slow to come.

Back at Hinds County Jail

Here We were back in our old cell, the last on the cellblock awaiting several hearings. During the hearing, We learned that the COINTELPRO (Counter Intelligence Program) had been strategically involved in the pursuit of RNA citizens and eventual arrest of the RNA 11. COINTELPRO, under J. Edgar Hoover, is a series of covert and illegal projects conducted by the FBI and aimed at surveilling, infiltrating, discrediting, and disrupting political organizations. Wikipedia. Records show that they went after groups such as Anti-Vietnam war organizers, the Nation of Islam, and 'Communist' groups here in the US. It would later include the Black Panther Party, the Black Liberation Army, the Republic of New Afrika as well as other groups and individuals like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X and anyone else who they deemed "subversive" or posed a "threat to national security". We read transcripts of conversations between the FBI, Jackson police and Mr. Hoover. In one document, Jackson police told J. Edgar Hoover, "We don't have anything on these people." Hoover responded, "Find something!" They had been ordered to concoct something. Extensive portions of most documents had been blacked out and rendered incomprehensible, while others were legible. Documents revealed several of the trumped-up charges that We were accused of. Although much of the information in the documents was redacted, i am certain that it was helpful to our attorneys in preparing for our hearings.

Attorneys worked tirelessly on our release in a most difficult and hostile environment. The first major win was the release of Sister Aisha Saleem. Her uncle was a powerful attorney from the north who successfully secured her release. Since Aisha was not at the 1148 Lewis Street location where the shoot-

ing occurred, there was no legal cause for her arrest. But, then again, We must consider that there was never a legal reason for any of the events and residual circumstances relative to the RNA. Sister Njeri and i missed Aisha but were happy for that victory. The next victory was soon after Aisha's release. Our attorneys were able to gain release for Sister Njeri who, as stated earlier, was pregnant and seriously in need of medical and prenatal care, especially after having been kicked by the police. To be pregnant in the conditions that We were in was dangerous for mother and child. So, while i was very happy for her release, i really missed her so much. I could have cried when she left!

The RNA Brothers and i were pleased that Aisha and Njeri had been released, but now i was alone in the cell and quite lonely which became a cause for concern for them. I spent most of my time reading and writing letters. I also kept a Journal for several months. Writing helped keep my spirits up, but my journal writing became boring as it began to be repetitive. Most days nothing eventful was happening, but i would write anyway. There were times when something out of the ordinary would happen and i wrote about it. I so enjoyed receiving letters from my mom, sisters, nieces, nephews, Hekima's mom and from lots of friends. On my birthday Hekima's mom sent me a card with money and a photo of Hekima, that was nice. Learning of events at home as well as at my school, UWM was uplifting. The letters provided a source of strength and encouragement in my unfortunate circumstances.

I was so worried about my mother. I knew she was suffering inside because of my situation. I was her youngest of nine children and her only one to ever spend a night in jail. This was devastating to her. She was aware of the history of Mississippi and of the horrors Black people had endured, so of course she was fearful of what might happen to her baby girl and her comrades. Simply walking while Black in Mississippi could often

be dangerous. To be incarcerated with offenses such as those we were charged with meant an almost certain death sentence. So, yes, i can totally relate to the concerns of all family and friends and i was especially worried about how my mom was holding up in this most unpleasant ordeal.

Hekima and i wrote to each other every day. We sent letters to each other via trustees when breakfast and lunch was delivered to us. The letters were a significant source of strength. We wrote love letters, and made plans for our future, including having babies, and traveling. He even drew a self-portrait and sent it to me. I still have that picture framed on my desk at home. I adored hearing from all of the RNA Brothers. They had each other while i was alone, so they did their best to make sure i was in good spirits. Then i received a letter from President Brother Imari Obadele that just tore me up! At that moment i did not understand, but he was laying the groundwork that would eventually facilitate my release. In the letter he wrote, "it has come to my attention that you are not a citizen of the Republic of new Afrika because you have never officially taken the oath." I was so upset that i shot back, "i am just as much a citizen as you or anyone else! What do you mean i am not a citizen?" I was crushed. We went back and forth repeatedly until Hekima convinced me to be calm. At some point i did begin to understand what Bro. Imari was doing. Hekima was not able to be concise regarding Brother Imari's legal tactics because our mail was read by the jailers and the exact plan would have been exposed.

My Jail Cell

Here i was, alone in the cell that i had previously shared with Njeri and Aisha. The cell contained four beds, so i arranged my cell to resemble a one room apartment. I took two bed mattresses and arrange them on one bed to make the

'couch' and covered it with a beautiful blanket that my Mom sent me. My 'couch' was on the back wall under my window, there was another bed on the back wall as well. A large box that i had received a gift in became a cocktail table and was placed in front of the 'couch'. One of the Trustees provided me with cloth flour sacks. I washed and ironed those flour sacks and they became my tablecloths. Since my cell was at the end of the cellblock, there were bars on the front and on the left side. Other cells had bars in the front of the cell only. On the right side of the room was a wall separating my cell from the third cell. On that wall was a shower, toilet, sink, and the bed i slept on. I used the bars on the left near my couch as my bookcase. I had received plenty of books from friends, family and UWM. Next to the bookcase along the bars was the empty bed that had no mattress, only springs, that i used for storage - on or beneath. Bars on the left in front of the empty bed became my pantry shelves. At the end of the empty bed, i placed a large box for my coffee pot and food items; this was my kitchen area. The bars in the front included a door and in the center of the door was an opening where the trustees would place food or pass letters and other items to me. I made my living space as comfortable and homey as possible.



Macyn M. Monegain

As previously indicated, there were four cells in the cell-block. The first cell seems to have been reserved for white women, the second cell was often empty the third cell seemed to have been reserved for Black women and the remaining cell was mine. As other women arrived, they had been made aware of who i was, so We would often converse and get to know each other, especially if they were in for an extended time. Most of the time they were only in jail for a weekend for disorderly conduct or being intoxicated. There was one older Sister, Mary who may have been in her 50's and was there frequently due to overindulgence in alcohol. She usually stayed just one or two days but came in very often. Most of the Sisters who came in seemed to have enjoyed meeting me and having political discussions. A few of them even asked me to give them African names. A Sister named Rose came in and stayed for a few months. She only had one visitor the entire time and was visibly sad. Rose was basically illiterate so she would have me write letters for her. I tried to help her as much as i was able to.

Rose always appeared so unhappy, and that seemed to have brought satisfaction to the jailers. I tried to cheer her up as she obviously was in need of companionship, but she would talk incessantly. Whenever i bought cigarettes, i shared them with her. Yes, i had been smoking cigarettes, unbeknownst to the Brothers, even Hekima. I did tell him about the smoking later though. I may have started smoking due to sheer boredom or simply to calm my nerves. One Sister i met, repeatedly offered me cigarettes, and at some point, i accepted. It was something to do. After she was released, i missed smoking, so i bought a pack. I had begun smoking years earlier but stopped before it became a habit and i figured i would only smoke temporarily and stop when i decided to. I also shared my food with Rose. I rarely ate the 'jail house' food because they primarily served pork or because it was nasty or simply unappetizing. I would send my food to Rose, usually my whole plate. The jailer

stopped sending me food altogether. I complained that "there are three of us in here (Rose, Maybell & myself), why did you only send two plates?" The nasty old jailer's response was, "I on't know nut'n 'bout dat"(I don't know nothing about that). The jailers were so racist. They resented the fact that i often did not eat their food, yet they did not want me to share it with the other Sisters. They did not want the Sisters to have any more food than they gave them. However, when the white girl was in the cell block, Jailer Chrysler told the trustee to go and get her an extra plate. The trustee also shared with us that another trustee had been sent to Parchman for giving a Black girl an extra plate, and the Sister was put in the "hot box" (the hot box was for punishment) for accepting it. It seemed as though they wanted to make life for us as miserable as was in their power.

My family and friends regularly sent food to me. I usually supplied the Sisters with coffee, tea, and other goodies because i usually had more than enough. I would make a pot of coffee pour a cup full, place it on the floor, then take the broom and carefully push it down the hall to the occupant of the next cell. If there were others in the other cells the person in the third cell would push it down to them and so on. Eventually, when several cells were occupied, We used a sheet, tore it into strips and tied the strips together making a cable. We would place our 'cable' high on the bars and pass it along to reach each cell. We discovered that We were able to transfer almost anything to all cells until it reached the intended person. The cable lasted for some time before it was discovered by the jailers. Upon discovering our cable, mean old Jailer Chrysler tore it down. We had to go back to sliding everything to each other on the floor with brooms. Chrysler spotted me pushing a cup of coffee to the next cell and confiscated my broom. Eventually, i was able to get it back. We learned to be creative in our desire for survival.

Very often, jailers would have visitors in who would just observe us. There were times that a visitor would stand outside of my cell looking at me and visually scan the contents of my cell. Whenever these observers appeared, i kept my head buried in a book acting as though they did not exist. I remember the jailer brought one guy down to look at me, i have no idea who he was. He stood there gawking at me (i suppose, because i never looked up), behaving as if they were at the zoo or something. I heard him ask the jailer "where she git that couch from", as well as other questions regarding me and my belongings and appearance of my cell. They said nothing to me, nor i to them. This scenario was repeated whenever there was an observer. I refused to even acknowledge their presence. Sometimes the jailer would walk the observer all around the side of my cell, allowing them better visual access as they continued asking questions and gawking. Whenever the observer walked around to the side of my cell, i would turn my back, and keep my head down in a book. Sometimes the women in the jail suffered greater humiliation than just having people gawking at them.

Jailers and trustees would sometimes enter cells of the women at night with or without their permission. I could hear the whispering and the sound of cell doors opening and closing. They would come to my cell and if i appeared to be asleep, they would enter the cells attempting to get with the women. I remember a young white girl who was housed in cell number one. She was from somewhere up north. One night the jailer came into the cell block and walked all the way down to my cell. I laid there as though i were asleep. He walked back to her cell and asked her, "do you want a moon pie"? She said "Oh yea, sure." He then asked "you gon let me come in yo cell?" She laughed and said "i'am not that cheep"! The jailer left and slammed the door. I was never concerned about anyone approaching my cell in that manner. Most inmates were very re-

spectful of the RNA Brothers and me, and what We stood for. However, i did catch one of the trustees peeking into a window, watching me as i was using the bathroom, so i placed a mattress in front of the shower and toilet. Jailers enjoyed meaningless acts like sending trustees to mop every cell except mine; intercepting my letters; taking items out of packages that i received; dispensing clean bed linens to all except me and Chrysler fussing because he had to deliver my packages. In addition to the discomfort of being locked up, i was forced to endure the constant negative actions and comments directed toward me. While frustrated, i realized that i had no control over the situation, so i tried to not let it upset me. What i resented the most was having items taken from packages that were sent to me. I reported the abuse and expressed my dissatisfaction to no avail.

Indecent Encounter

Despite the abundance of negative experiences that i endured, i never worried about anyone coming into my cell trying to take advantage of me sexually. However, i learned that i too would be sexually harassed! There was one indecent encounter with a Black trustee that truly frightened me. Mean old jailer Chrysler and his trustee entered the cellblock. The trustee stopped right in front of my cell. I was sitting on my 'couch' reading. He spoke to me in a rather mean tone, "why you always reading? Every time i come in here you reading. u'm gon' come in there tonight." I certainly knew what that threat meant. I was fearful because i had heard the men going in and out of other ladies' cells at night. I was afraid, but i realized that i was alone and vulnerable with no one to defend me. I decided to employ whatever means were at my disposal to defend myself. So, i used my mind and my voice. I slowly looked up from my book and asked, "are you speaking to me?" He replied, "yeah, who the hell you think u'm talking to? You the only one

in there ain't you? I'm gon come in there and take what i want". As frightened as i was, i refused to allow him to know it. I stood up, slowly approached the bars and spoke in a low sultry, but confident tone, "you've got to be out of your damn mind if you are talking to me. If you are that stupid to come into my cell, you have got to be out of your damn mind! Now, i want to give you a bit of advice. You said you are going to come into my cell and take what you want. You are bigger than i am, you're probably physically stronger than i am, so you might be able to come in here and do whatever you want to me, even though i am pretty tough my damn self! But i must advise you to have a helicopter sitting outside of the door waiting for you whenever you leave this place! Don't plan on taking an airplane to get you away, because you got to get to the airport and you just might not make it there. (I began speaking louder) Yeah, i advise you to have the helicopter waiting right outside of Hinds County Jail to get you the hell away from here." He said, "what that's posed to mean, what's that posed to mean?" I realized that i had gotten his attention, so then i really laid it on thick. I threw the book down and began marching back and forth in front of the bars and i said "yeah, you, Chrysler and nobody else is bad enough or crazy enough to come in here and bother me; you ain't gonna take nothing from me Brother! Me, you say you gonna take something from me, come on in my cell Brother, and take what you can! You just ain't that damn bad Brother, and you ain't got no army"! He responded, "is that a threat?" I replied, "just a little bit of constructive advice. You take it how you want, but remember sometimes it pays to listen. I can look at you and tell that you are stupid, but damn, man, i didn't have any idea that you were that damn stupid as to threaten me! I feel for any fool who tries to mess with me! You ain't bad enough to mess with me!" I marched and preached until finally Chrysler heard the commotion and called to the trustee since i had gotten very loud at that point, and they left the cell block and slammed the door. But i wonder what would have hap-

pened if he had known how petrified i really was. When it was all over, after they left, i went and dropped down onto my bed, and just laid there for a long while, trying to collect my nerves. The next day that trustee was handing out free milk and juice to the RNA Brothers and me. That was my only real fearful encounter. From that day forward that Brother only spoke to me with respect and concern. Evidently, i invoked some deep thoughts in that trustee.

Female inmates were really at risk at Hinds County Jail. Jailers and trustees alike could take advantage of females as they pleased. Occasionally, they would offer favors and other times simply force themselves on women inmates. From my observation, some women were willing participants while others had no choice, a sad situation overall. In a restricted environment, you must utilize whatever resources at your disposal in protecting yourself. I used the mystique of the Republic of new Afrika as my resource. That Brother had no knowledge of who were RNA citizens or what level or repercussions awaited him should he violate a female citizen.

Many people in Mississippi heard the consistently negative and incorrect information concerning the RNA via the white controlled media sources. In contras, there were numbers of RNA citizens who moved to Mississippi from other states and began organizing there. Their work included but was not limited to actively educating the community of the RNA program and objectives. Most of the Black individuals in the Black community were accepting and supportive of RNA. On the other hand, some were afraid to be associated with us because of negative publicity and white resentment, thus sought to distance themselves from our citizens. A segment of the Black population believed that We had to have lost our minds by our mere presence in the notoriously hostile state of Mississippi. Still, most were supportive and welcomed us, old and young

alike with their blessings. Brother Chuma shared a heartwarming story. He and another Brother were out seeking those who were willing to learn of the RNA when they spotted an old, dilapidated house far back from the street. The house appeared to have been abandoned so they planned to pass on by, but they reconsidered and went on and knocked on the door. An older Sister, he said appeared to have been in her late eighties or nineties answered the door. They introduced themselves and proceeded to tell her all about the RNA and the plans for our people. The Sister listened attentively, then told them to "hold on, stay right there; I'll be right back". She returned with an old shotgun and handed it to them saying, "I am too old to help you, I've been waiting for this day for a very long time etc." She wished them well! There were varying feelings about the RNA and our presence in Mississippi. People were curious about the RNA and its objectives. Most of the white community were fearful and far too many were openly hateful and antagonistic. There was no justification for negative feelings however, because We were a peaceful people on a mission. A mission to create a better life for our people and our intention was to accomplish our goal of Black nationhood. Our mission was no different than any other group that worked to free their people from enslavement, Jim Crow segregation and all dehumanizing forms of oppression associated with white supremacy/racism. Our history in this country has been one of long endless struggle for a better life for our people. We have never ceased striving, despite relentless forces of resistance. However, as a songwriter says, "We fall down, but We get up." We will never stop trying, there is no way that We can afford to stop because We owe it to our youth to continue the struggle! There will always be segments of our community that will continue to seek a better life; to fight for self-determination until We have achieved victory for our people! As Hekima would say, "self-rule or subjugation!"

Lonely Hours

I spent many long, lonely hours in my cell! I exercised most mornings, then spent hours reading and writing. I received mail from family and friends almost daily. Washing and ironing the few clothes that i possessed kept me busy. There were times when i was the only person in the entire cell block - an eerie feeling indeed! There was one group of Sisters being temporarily detained who were nasty toward me, saying, "she sound just like a honkey." Thankfully, their stay was brief with minimal conversation. Then, i recall the Sisters who came in talking junk about Black men. Of course, i enlightened them on the harsh reality of Black life in this racist society, etc. Jail personnel continued removing items from packages that were sent to me. The experience of confinement was tough, but i maintained the strength to persevere. No matter the level of hostility and unpleasantness, i refused to be broken since i understood that my situation could get worse! Yes, i was upset quite frequently, but they never knew it. However, they knew when i was angry because i refused to hold my tongue!

As undesirable as conditions were, the presence of a rat in my cell and failure of jail personnel to adequately respond to my complaints regarding that rat added to the overall misery and frustration of being locked up. Oh my God! i thought i would die! I was afraid to go to sleep! Nothing was ever done to keep the rat out of my cell, but after a while i didn't see it any more. My stay in Hinds County jail was longer than at any of the other facilities. I spent a couple of weeks at the Jackson City Jail, Hinds County Jail, several weeks at Parchment Penitentiary, back to Hinds County jail, to Meridian jail, to a jail in Canton Mississippi, and finally a return to Hinds County.

I was transported alone to Meridian jail by a man and apparently his wife. They were more humane than most people that i encountered. When i left Hinds County jail, i was handcuffed and shackled as was customary when transported from one facility to another. While being transported to the next jail, the couple stopped at a small restaurant to have lunch and use the restroom. The woman instructed her husband to remove my cuffs and shackles before entering the restaurant. He asked teasingly, "you ain't gon run is you?" I offered no response as the handcuffs and shackles were removed. The restaurant provided an opportunity to freshen up as well as enjoy lunch. Having left the restaurant and continued to Meridian, to my surprise they did not put the cuffs and shackles back on me. I have minimal recollection about Meridian jail because i was only detained there for a month or so. I remember that the jailer only spoke briefly to inmates. We could purchase junk food such as honey buns, candy and soda that was readily available at any time. When being returned to Hinds County jail in Jackson, the same two people who had taken me to Meridian were now transporting me to Hinds County jail. I have almost no memory of the few weeks i was jailed in Canton, Mississippi. I never understood why i was relocated to Meridian and Canton alone, while the Brothers were basically detained at one location.

Back to Hinds County Jail

Upon return to Hinds County jail, the time for Hekima's trial was approaching. Nothing had changed at Hinds County. Women were in cells 2 and 3. My old cell had remained untouched. It was as though i had never left. Again, i was unable to see the brothers, but i wrote and receive letters from them. Some of the Sisters and i bonded as we chatted for hours and shared our food, cigarettes, and my books. One jailer rarely said a word to me, but he would stand outside of my cell and

just stare at me which was an uncomfortable feeling. He would have trustees bring milk and juice to all of us ladies. When he did speak to us, he spoke very humanely and was the only jailer who was not downright nasty. It was as though deep down inside, he realized that We were all human beings; that We were women. Yet, i still did not trust him. I would argue with the nasty personnel and tell them where to go, but this guy really frightened me with his kindness. We nicknamed him, "the little mouse", as he was sort of small build and quiet.

Brother President Imari was continuously busy with our case while We were incarcerated. Tirelessly writing, and speaking with attorneys to free us and assisting other inmates as he fought for improved jail conditions. In May of 1972, a pair of attorneys, Maureen Malone and Dorothy Graham filed a civil Action suit naming Bro. Imari as well as all RNA incarcerated citizens as plaintiffs against the Sheriff of Hinds County, Mississippi, J.D. McAdory, the Board of Supervisors and the Circuit Court Judges of Hinds County, Mississippi in challenge conditions and general practices of Hinds County Jail.

Some Legal issues and points of the lawsuit included:

1. No censorship or opening of inmate's incoming or outgoing mail.
2. No restrictions on the number of letters that an inmate writes.
3. There should be no corporal punishment; eliminate 'Hot Box'
4. The County Jail should be completely desegregated.

5. Increased protection of inmates from assaults of other inmates.
6. There must be no overcrowding of inmate facilities.
7. Trustee system be phased out and replaced with civilian guards.
8. Food approved by professional nutritionist; prepared and served in a timely basis.
9. Female matrons must be present for women housed in the jail.
10. Finally, the law suit included a request, for a completely new Hinds County Jail facility.

(there were several other request included in the Civil Action Suit, not Listed here)

On June 18, 1973, the Honorable Walter L. Nixon, United States District Judge, Southern District of Mississippi, entered a Declaratory judgement against the Sheriff, Board of supervisors and Circuit Court Judges of Hinds County, Mississippi which ordered them to make wide scale changes in the patterns and practices of the jail.

A major victory for plaintiffs and attorneys. This was a bold undertaking, but The simple act of defending us was a bold step for any attorney in Mississippi at that time.

After several hearings, each of our requests were granted. Even the stipulation for a new facility was granted, though none of us would be there when the new building was completed! The quest for improved conditions was never about us,

it was about human rights. The overwhelming majority of incarcerated and abused inmates were Black people who suffered immensely horrid conditions for too long. We had demanded and achieved improved jail conditions for our people.



Tamu at the new Hinds County Jail forty five years later.

State Trials Begin

Hekima was first to stand trial. His mom, Olivia McClure, my sisters, Doris Griffin and E.K.Fowler, and my cousin, Virleen Johnson were in attendance. I was not allowed to attend the trial and was denied access to newspapers for information on the proceedings. Since i had been in regular communication with local Brothers in the cell above mine and established a healthy rapport, they provided me with newspaper articles and information that was ingeniously smuggled into my cell, and we talked every day. I talked to them about the RNA and

other groups that were fighting for our liberation. They seemed seriously interested in our liberation struggle, and interested in helping to keep me abreast of the trial and the status of our case. The attorneys also kept me informed when they visited.

Jury selection was quite unusual. First, because the jury selection process lasted more than seven days. More than seven hundred people were on the list of potential jurors. Prosecuting attorneys utilized every legal trick at their disposal to eliminate Black jurors. Understanding that most white perspective jurors had admitted that they believed that our RNA Brothers were guilty, and should have been put to death without having been presented with any evidence. Our Attorneys were extremely careful in jury selection, seeking those jurors who might be sympathetic, judge fairly and certainly those who were not in favor of the death penalty. A seemingly impossible task when considering the hostile racial climate. The primary objective was to save Hekima's life. The attorneys fought a vigorous and skillful legal battle.

When the jury selection process was completed, there were eleven Caucasians; six men and five women and one elderly Black man. Not an ideal jury composition for our side. Even some white people in newspaper interviews commented on how racist and unfair the trial was going. Aware that the courtroom would be full of spectators, a deliberate effort was made that conditions be as uncomfortable as possible for those in attendance. Attendees encountered three security checkpoints, presented personal identification along with being photographed and videotaped before admission into the courtroom.

Hinds County, Jackson, Mississippi trial

The judge held court late into the night, disregarding objections by the defense attorney on the grounds that lengthy court sessions hampered the ability to adequately represent their clients. Judge Russell D. Moore, III kept court in session until 2:45 a.m. Observers stated that it was the longest day of court that they could remember. Prosecuting attorneys and the judge orchestrated the entire proceedings so that it was nearly an impossible win for our attorneys. It was unreal!

The local Brothers upstairs from me, became increasingly interested in our case and in the Republic of new Afrika in general. We engaged in extensive dialogue regarding the case and the RNA. That all changed when i was called to testify during Hekima's trial. Hekima, as co-defendant, represented himself in his own case and as a calculated move to gain my release, he called me to the witness stand. In his questioning he asked me if i had ever taken the official RNA oath to become a citizen of record? I never officially took the oath, so i answered, "no", "then you are not a citizen", he said. I was still not comfortable saying no to having taken the oath, but i said "no, technically no". There were additional questions, but the goal of his line of questioning was my exoneration. Groundwork for that maneuver had been laid in the letter that Brother President Imari wrote to me weeks prior regarding my not having officially taken the RNA oath. After questioning by members of the defense and prosecuting teams, the judge said, "you can go sit by your husband." I was shocked that he was permitting me to remain in the court room, to sit next to Hekima, and even more stunned that he had referred to Hekima as my husband. Earlier in the proceedings, prosecuting attorneys implied and emphasize that we were not married. I was able to sit there for a

while, but later returned to my cell. Things were not going well for Hekima and my heart was breaking!

When i returned to my cell, the Sisters there were all eager to hear about my testimony. They were all rooting for us. Reception from the Brothers above my cell was quite different. We always spoke to each other every morning as well as when they passed newspaper articles to me. The morning following my testimony, i called up to the Brothers to see what news items they had for me. They did not answer. I called a few more times and finally one brother stated that they were angry and disappointed in me. I had no idea why. Then he said to me, "you turned your back on your nation and your husband too". I never learned what was printed in the newspaper or what prompted their negative attitudes. I attempted to explain the reasons for what was said in court. I can only surmise that they had concluded that i was some sort of traitor by answering "no" to officially being a citizen of the RNA. I tried to explain that this was a strategy to gain my release. I was not comfortable with the legal strategy, but this is what the Brothers believed would increase my possibility for release. I was more valuable to them on the outside for support in securing release of the others. I believe that they never quite understood or accepted my explanation because limited conversation followed. Nevertheless, the strategy was ingenious and was the primary impetus in my exoneration.

Hekima's trial was very intense. I have no idea how the prosecution concluded that Hekima was responsible for the fatal shot that killed a police officer. As the heavy barrage of gunfire in both directions lasted for several minutes, how was it possible to determine who fired a fatal shot? Yet, Hekima was being tried for murder and if found guilty could face the death penalty. Hekima was found guilty, but jurors, realizing that he had clearly been set up, refused to invoke the death

penalty. The attorneys were brilliant in the meticulous selection of jurors that ultimately saved Hekima's life. Although he did not receive a death penalty, Hekima's sentence was life without possibility of parole; and that was only regarding State charges. It was painful for me to hear that Hekima would never be released from prison. After sentencing, Hekima said to me, "if it looks like i will be released at some point, i expect you to be waiting for me, but if it looks like i won't be released; that this sentence will stick, i want you to go on and make a life for yourself." Part of what he said did not resonate with me. I refused to accept that he would be locked up for life. And as far as "making a life for myself", that was just not an option. i already had a life with him and that was it.

Following Hekima's trial, the trials for other RNA brothers began. Brother Ofaga Quaduss (Wayne James) was next. He was also found guilty and sentenced to life without possibility of parole. Then, Addis Abba (Dennis Shillingford) was tried by the state and also found guilty and received a life sentence. Karim Obafami (Larry Jackson) who was only fifteen years old at the time of the incident, was also found guilty and likewise sentenced to life in prison despite his youth. He would eventually serve more time incarcerated than any of us, as some of the Brothers were released on a technical error made by the state. When finally released, he was released on parole and would be on parole for the remainder of his life. Karim transitioned several years ago. Chuma Ascari (Charles Stallings), who was only 17 years old and had not handled a weapon was convicted of conspiracy with a sentence of five years. Sister Njeri Quaddus (Tony Austin) and i were not tried by the state. Our legal team was successful in our exoneration. I was released shortly after Hekima's trial.

As expected, media coverage was extensive. In their coverage of trials, they even found it necessary to focus on my ap-

pearance, specifically, my African attire. My sister, Kay Fowler had made me a beautiful floor length African dress. However, I had no 'gele' (African head wrap) to cover my hair, no comb or pick, so i had to improvise by using a pencil with only a broken piece of mirror to slowly pick out my hair. I just took my time with my hair to get it right; especially because i would be seeing my man and i had to be 'cute. I was told that the media reported as much on my attire as they did on trial proceedings. More than likely that was a gross exaggeration.

Days after Hekima's trial, i was visited by an attorney who informed me that i would be released the next day. I returned to my cell and announced the good news to the other Sisters, who were in cells #2 and #3. They all had been there for a while and We had bonded somewhat. They were happy and excited for me. We decided to keep in touch and expressed how We would miss each other, etc. That night when the night jailer came (the one who had been very human to us) into the cellblock with a trustee, one of the ladies, being so filled with excitement about my release, told the jailer about my anticipated release the next day. His demeanor changed quite abruptly! He walked briskly over to my cell asking in a loud and demanding tone, "why didn't you tell me you were getting out tomorrow?" Stunned by his sudden changed behavior, i said nothing. This was new, he had never displayed any level of hostility to any of us before, and i couldn't understand why it would matter that i didn't tell him that i was leaving. It wasn't like We were best friends or anything, and it wasn't his business when i was leaving. He exited the cellblock and slammed the door. We were all so unnerved by his behavior. The Sister who had revealed that i was leaving felt that she had spoken inappropriately and repeatedly apologized. Minutes later the jailer and trustee returned. Neither said anything to the other Sisters, they rapidly stormed all the way to my cell and opened the door and ordered me to get out. I don't know if i had ever felt as fearful as i did at that

moment, but i obeyed. I remember glancing at the trustee in appeal for his assistance or intervention, but he just looked at me grinning with amusement. As i passed the other Sisters in their cells, their faces were all pressed against the bars looking as full of fear as i was, and probably feeling guilty for having told the jailer that i was leaving. The jailer, trustee and i exited the cell block, i could only imagine that they were about to rape me, kill me or both. Approaching another jail cell across from our cellblock, the jailer, in a harsh and forceful manner said to me, "if you ever tell anybody about this, i will kill you and your husband!" He pushed me into the cell and there stood Hekima! We were both so shaken that all We could do was hug each other in a tight embrace. Hekima's experience was comparable to my own. With no idea where he was being taken in the middle of the night unofficially, unsure of his fate, one can only think it is to do bodily harm. While a grand gesture on the part of the jailer, i only wish he would not have scared us so much. The jailer told us, "y'all hurry up; do what you can do. You ain't got much time 'cause We gon' be changing shifts pretty soon." We were both so unnerved, all We could do was hold each other. We certainly were not comfortable with taking things any further. The precious and unexpected moment of just being together was a real treat!

Upon return to my cellblock, the Sisters were in their cells in eager anticipation of my return to learn what happened. Fearful of the jailer's threat, i just told them that i had not been hurt and that i was alright. The Sister who revealed my impending release to the jailer remained apologetic. I assured her that all was fine. We were in semi-celebration of my release that morning. We continued to express how much We would miss each other and how happy they were for me. A few of the Sisters and i wrote to each other for a while, but communication eventually ended. That was the last time i would see Hekima until i visited him at Parchman months later.

I was released that morning in early June of 1972. Brother Chokwe Lumumba picked me up. Before heading home, i visited with RNA Brothers and Sisters overnight. Before arriving at the airport in preparation for my flight home i attempted disguising myself. Aware that most people expected that i would be dressed in floor length African attire, i wore white hot pants, big round sunglasses, white cork heel shoes and a skimpy top. I did not realize how much weight i had lost while incarcerated. I weighed 105 pounds. My previous average weight was 120 to 125 pounds. I remember telling Chokwe, "in a minute i will be skinny!" Brother Chokwe laughed so hard and said, "in a minute? Really, in a minute?" Arriving home, my brother-in-law told me that my butt looked like someone had inflated a balloon and busted it. Jokes abounded regarding my loss of weight. When people took me out to eat, they often tried to get me to eat double portions.

Before leaving Jackson, i was interviewed a few times. In one interview upon my release, i stated adamantly that, "i will leave no stone unturned until the brothers are all released". I meant that with everything in me! Achieving full release of the Brother's would not be easy, but i was convinced that their release was not an impossibility and i was prepared to do all within my power to secure their release. It was my obligation, my moral responsibility to see them set free.

Arriving in Milwaukee

I flew home and was greeted at the airport by a group of local Milwaukee Brothers known as the Commandos. These Brothers were recognized for community efforts in Milwaukee for several years. I am not sure but i think they began as the Youth Council of the NAACP. During the 1960's, they were responsible for major accomplishments under the leadership of Father Groppi. While i knew none of the Brothers person-

ally, my family had been communicating with them on my behalf. Concerned for my safety, mom asked them to escort me home from the airport since these Brothers had a reputation for looking out for 'the people.' Not sure how they recognized me, but the Commandos introduced themselves, surrounded me, secured my luggage, then guarded me all the way to my Mom's front door. Right now, my family and i are still grateful for their assistance.

My return home was very emotional. Mom was seated in her rocking chair; i dropped down on her lap as We cried and embraced. I remember telling her that i never intended to hurt her, but i knew that i had. I expected her to say, "that's ok baby", but she said, "you sure did!" Her response was unexpected and kind of threw me, because i only wanted to hear words of forgiveness. Then she said "it's not that you did anything wrong but i can't deny my hurt, and i am just so glad to see you alive and healthy! I was afraid that i would never see you alive again". Our exchange went on for a while, just being grateful to be together. My Sisters as well as nephews and nieces were all elated that i was back home. My nephew, Tyree Fowler (Teddy) was so excited that he jumped from a swing and broke his leg when informed that i was coming home. I also had a brand-new nephew, Robert Strickland Jr. (Robb) waiting to meet me. He was only one week old. I Had been away for 10 months from August of 1971 to June of 1972, it was wonderful to be back home.

Getting settled in was not easy. There were overwhelming demands for my time. Speaking engagements, meetings with attorneys that often involved travel as well as fundraising activities, and various people in the community who just wanted to talk with me. A young sister, Kujichagulia, We called her Kuji, came to my aid and helped me get organized. Kuji took charge of all of my activities, intercepting and screening my calls, de-

ciding which callers i should speak with etc. Kuji designated her telephone number as my contact number. A major sacrifice because that was the home phone number for her family and a potential inconvenience. Yet, Kuji worked it out and was a tremendous relief for me. I talked so much the first week or so, that i literally lost my voice. Micki (Birda) would be on one phone while i was on an extension. I would write down my responses to caller's inquiries and she would relay my message. It was at that point, that Kuji assumed command of telephone calls until i was better able to take control. Kuji and i eventually lost contact with each other, but i sincerely hope that she and i will reconnect, and i am able to adequately thank her for her sacrifices.

I returned to the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee as a full-time student while employed part time at Triple "O" (Organizations of Organizations) under the direction of Brother Larry Harwell, another friend.

I began regular local and national travel on speaking engagements and fundraising. On one occasion i spoke on the same program as Sister Rosa Parks in Detroit, Michigan. Meetings with attorneys continued and i spoke at numerous gatherings and conferences as requested. If the Brothers needed a Sister to speak, they would call me and without hesitation, i would go. The primary focus of my speaking was the shootout in Mississippi and the blatant societal injustices related to that event as well as other current concerns. One of my local speaking engagements was at Robert Fulton Junior High School where my nephew, Raymond Washington was a student who told his teacher about the RNA incident. His teacher, Mrs. Janette Bryant was familiar with the story and invited me to speak on my experiences. The Black community in Milwaukee as a whole, was interested in and expressed significant support for the RNA 11.

I was willing and eager to travel to any location to speak of our case. Brother Chokwe Lumumba called to request my presence in Mississippi to speak at a "Solidarity Day Program". I accepted the invitation, purchased my airline ticket and was packed and set to depart. However, that night before i was scheduled to leave, my mother had one of those dreams that she sometimes had. Although mom rarely got into our personal affairs, whenever she seriously advised us against certain moves, We listened! Not only regarding her children, but anyone who knew her would listen and take heed. We had witnessed on numerous occasions how events would materialize according to her dreams or feelings. So, no matter the urgency to act on our personal desires, if mom advised against our plans, We responded accordingly. Although hurt and disappointed, i called Brother Chokwe to apologize and explain to him why i was unable to attend the Solidarity Day Program. I never knew how Brother Chokwe processed that information, because We never spoke about it again (he was just so special). He never questioned me about it, he simply accepted that i was not going to be there.

Hekima and the RNA Brothers were now housed at Parchman Penitentiary (Farm). My life was anything but normal. I was visiting Hekima at every opportunity. On one of my early visits, he had been severely beaten and had mace sprayed in his face. I had heard about it on the news before i left home, but when i saw him, it was nearly impossible for me to not burst into tears! He looked terrible! He had lost so much weight, his eyes were bulging with dark circles around them; burns from the mace, but he was in good spirits and told me that he was fine. I tried to act as though i was not affected, but i was upset and furious. I was not alone in my feelings. The entire Black community in Milwaukee had heard about the incident and filled with justified anger.

I visited Hekima so often that a ticket agent in the downtown Milwaukee office once asked me if i had a job in Mississippi. She added, "well you seem to go every week" and We just laughed. I told her no, my mission in Mississippi is much more important than a job.

Visits To Parchman Penitentiary

The appearance of Parchman Penitentiary could be intimidating, yet it retained some humane attributes. The most intimidating feature was that both guards and inmates carried rifles. Some of the inmates served as guards. If anyone decided to escape or get out of line, they would shoot to kill. You could hear lots of horrific stories about Parchman, it was not the place where you allowed yourself to misbehave. There was a cemetery right there on the farm where lots of inmates were buried, which added to the creepiness. Today, there are continued efforts to upgrade the notoriously inhumane conditions at Parchman Penitentiary. Inmates worked long hours on the farm at picking cotton and other labors. At first, Hekima was among inmates assigned to "pull cotton". To pull cotton is different than picking cotton. Pulling cotton is extracting the small bits of cotton that remain after the main section has been removed. Thankfully, Hekima managed to be reassigned as a cook. He cooked for the other inmates. One humane aspect of Parchman is that visitors were not forced to visit loved ones through bars or glass. Inmates could sit with visitors, to hug them and hold hands. When visitors brought food, inmates could sit and enjoy meals with family and friends. Visits were very civil. A few inmates had their own private spaces. Hekima had a workspace comprised of two rooms and a workbench where he fashioned leather goods that he sold. There was also a table and chairs for us to relax and have lunch together.

He crafted several leather gifts such as visors, purses, wallets, belts for family members and he even made the first shoes for Noni and Chinyere as newborns. The most unique attribute about Parchment was permission of conjugal visits for couples. Couples provided their own sheets and towels and utilize one of the houses available for private time. As one couple would exit the house, there would usually be another couple waiting to enter. The ideal visits were the three-day visits. The RNA brothers at Parchman eventually became trustees, thus, were permitted to request three-day visits. Inmates had to earn three-day visits. Visitors had an opportunity to live with an inmate for three days and nights. The visitors had to bring food and all other necessary items for the visit. Many of the three-day houses were old and rickety but did have furniture and adequate sleeping and cooking facilities. Some were very nice, relatively clean, and modern. they resembled a motel with three or four private spaces that were one room apartments. Visitors were happy for the accommodations and the family time. Certainly, the more modern facilities were our favorite, but We were simply happy to spend time together in whatever We got. We could never know in advance which accommodations would be available. Three-day visits were valuable in facilitating and maintaining family interaction and continuity, but our Sunday visits were important as well.

In the early days when visiting Hekima, i used to fly into Jackson, and stay at my Sister's Sister-in-law 's house Callie Douglass. I had to get up very early and take the bus to Parchman. The bus was always crowed with many people on their way to Parchman for their visits. However, one Sunday, there was a winter freeze, and i boarded the bus with great anticipation for my visit. Coming from Wisconsin, that little freeze did not get my attention at all. I did notice that there was no one on the bus except me, and that was very strange, but i still did not understand what was going on. I did not realize that

during a winter freeze or snow that the city shuts down. The long lonely bus ride continued. When the bus finally stopped at Parchman, i hurriedly got off and proceeded to the visitor's processing area. I was the only visitor there. I was met by a big tall guard who laughed very loud and said. "aint no visiting here today, visits been canceled". I was shocked and terribly upset. I started crying and said "but I've come so far, I've come all the way from Milwaukee Wisconsin". I guess the guy felt sorry for me and ended up letting me visit Hekima. That was indeed an unusual visit. Of all those inmates at Parchman, and there were many , Hekima was the only one who received a visitor that day. He was in awe as to how i managed to get in to see him.

I was so thankful to Callie for allowing me to stay at her house during my visits. She and her two daughters Cleotha and Joyce Ann, and some of their neighbors were very kind to me. One Sunday after visiting Hekima and back at Callie's house, on Illinois Street i was invited across the street to Miss Annie's house where there was often music with dancing and drinks. On that Sunday, as neighbors gathered, there was a monetary collection for me. A special gesture that i will always hold dear. Callie and her friends openly demonstrated their support of our cause.

Federal Trials Began

When trials for federal charges began, Sister Njeri (Tony Austin) and i returned to Mississippi. All of our moms were in attendance. The trial was held in the federal court in Biloxi, Mississippi. We rented rooms at a motel, and one Sister who lived in the area opened her home to us. Local Brothers and Sisters were sympathetic to our situation, attended the hearings to show support.

Just as with the state trials, We were falsely accused on a variety of charges. The most absurd being the automatic weapon charge. We were accused of possessing and firing an automatic weapon. That charge was proven false by a ballistics expert obtained by the court. The judge ordered the entire court to the Gulf shores for a demonstration by the ballistics expert to show that the so-called automatic weapon was capable of being fired automatically. We were accused of altering the weapon to cause it to fire automatically. It should be noted here that the weapon had been in their possession since the day of the shootout, allowing significant time and expertise in their desired alteration of the weapons. However, the ballistics expert proceeded to fire the gun out over the water as instructed by the judge. The gun did not fire automatically. After repeated attempts at firing while repositioning the weapon, the ballistics expert eventually conceded saying, "Judge, i kane make this thang fi automatically to save my life." Still, We were charged with possession, and the Brothers convicted of possession and firing an automatic weapon. So goes the remainder of our trial. Accusation after accusation, RNA brothers were tried and convicted. It did not matter that the accusations were false and concocted. They manufactured the narrative with truth never factored into the equation. Their singular goal was convictions on all levels. As planned, the Brothers were convicted on every charge despite falsified testimony and evidence. The Brothers were each sentenced to fifteen years in Federal prison.

I was accused of numerous counts of bogus charges. The spy, Snoopy testified under oath that i was among attendees at a RNA meeting in July 1971, where plans to overthrow the United States government were outlined. Attorney Constance Slaughter-Harvey, a member of our legal defense team questioned him, "are you sure that you saw Tamu Sana, aka Ann Norman at a meeting to overthrow the United States of America in July 1971?" He answered, "Yes, i am sure." Repeating the

question to allow Snoopy time to reconsider his response, Attorney Slaughter, slammed my passport directly before him to stress her point. "Ann Norman, aka Tamu Sana was studying at the University of Accra, Ghana in West Africa on the date in question! Now, are you sure that you saw her here in the United States at a meeting planning to overthrow the United States Government?" He was astonished and replied, "oh, ah, i may have made a mistake." The trial was full of lies and inconsistencies. They had nothing on any of us. Our mission was not of a criminal nature; rather our mission was to create a better life for our people. We had no desire for conflict or confrontation of any nature. We were not looking for a fight. Our only mantra was to abide by "the first law of nature; self-preservation." We were living in our truth.

Throughout the entire ordeal of the Federal trial, Sister Njeri and i were happy to visit Brothers Offaga and Hekima. We visited with them several times during the trial. Upon completion of the trials, We returned to our respective homes to resume our lives. Reflecting on events, trial outcomes, and having observed the American judicial system at work, it suddenly become crystal clear to me that the hand that holds the power is the hand that writes the story. The story will stand as truth no matter the existence or absence of truth!

Visits to Parchman Resumed

After visiting Hekima for a couple of years, via bus to Parchman, RNA Brothers informed me that another sister who was an RNA supporter, visited Parchman regularly. It was quite possible that i may be able to ride with her to Parchman. The idea of traveling by car was indeed more appealing than by bus. I was introduced to Sister Dorothy. By that time, the number of people visiting our Brothers had increased substantially but Dorothy visited more consistently than anyone else. Visi-

tors would check to be certain they were well, if they needed anything, but mainly to be assured there was no mistreatment. Dorothy was more than pleased to have my company in her travels to Parchman. She began to pick me up at the airport, take me to Callie's house, then pick me up on Sunday morning for the drive to Parchman with her two daughters, Yolanda and Tonga. Riding with Sister Dorothy was undeniably more convenient than traveling by bus.

At some point, Sister Dorothy decided to relocate to Greenwood, Mississippi where her family resided and because it was much closer to Parchman than Jackson. We had really gotten to know each other and developed a genuine friendship. Dorothy assured me that her relocation to Greenwood would not affect our trips to Parchman and that i could continue to ride with her. She added that if i would fly into Greenwood, that she would pick me up from the airport and that i was welcome to stay at her home.

Baby Time

I returned to school while continuing to visit Hekima as well as being actively involved in the case of the RNA Brothers. After obtaining a bachelor's degree in January of 1973, i became concerned regarding my biological clock. I have always desired to have children. I've always loved children. I was very close to my nephews and nieces, even the ones who are older than me, but now i wanted Hekima and i to start our family despite his life sentence and Federal time. I refused to accept the possibility of him spending the remainder of his life in prison. I told Hekima that We should try to start our family. I emphasized the fact that i was ready and not willing to wait until he was released from prison. He may not have agreed with my idea, but he certainly did not fight me on it. Thus, our quest for my pregnancy was underway! My doctor provided a chart

and told me what time of the month to try. I lined up my fertile days with Prison visiting days as well as days that i had money for plane tickets. The very first time i was able to line everything up, bingo! We got Aynda!

C-5 (Command 5 in the Topographical Research Center in Milwaukee), aka Damani Courtney, a friend who assisted me on my special reproductive visit. Damani rented a car for his wife, sister-in-law Hattie and me to drive to Mississippi. We stayed at the home of a relative of Hattie's. This was the visit when I became pregnant with our first daughter, Aynda Mariama.

Pregnancy was such a happy and exciting event. I wanted the world to know that i was about to become a mommy. I even sent out pregnancy announcements. It was just the most wonderful feeling! I took photos of my growing belly every month, and sent them to my husband. I was in a most blissful state and continued to visit Hekima, baby bump and all. My friend, Kamba (Brenda Murphy), gifted me with the book "From Conception to Birth" and i carried it everywhere i went! I studied it as i would a textbook! I quit my job when i was about three weeks pregnant. My pregnancy had not been confirmed, but i just knew. When i informed the director of the Center, Brother Larry Harwell that i was quitting my job because i believed that i was pregnant, he laughed and said, "you don't even know for sure if you are pregnant". My reply to him was, "i am quitting this job because i will not allow anyone, or anything to interfere with the birth of this baby!" I can be such a drama queen at times! I was beside myself with impending motherhood! My sister, Doris, provided funding for me to attend graduate school which would occupy most of my time while pregnant. I purchased cute maternity clothes then strutted about as though i was queen of queens! At last, that glorious day on October 18, 1974! I gave birth to our first little

bundle of joy, Aynda Mariama Kanyama Norman. A nurse inquired of me, "who is this baby? I've had several long-distance phone calls; calls from preschools; calls from the University, and dozens of local people are calling, and there is an hourly announcement of her birth on the radio; who is this child"? All i could do was laugh and say, "this is just my child, she's my baby". Now i was eager to take Aynda to see her daddy! She was just so beautiful to me.

Aynda and i had been at home for about a week when photos arrived of her as a newborn. I was filled with excitement and i had to share the beautiful photos with someone. My sister, E. Kay Fowler stopped by and i screamed, "look, look! Aren't these beautiful?" I was beside myself. I was behaving as though no one had ever experienced the birth of a baby. I washed and ironed her complete new wardrobe. I sterilized everything that i fed her except for my breast milk, until a nurse advised me against sterilizing everything. She said that the immune system could become weakened, as result of it. I was actually glade that the nurse advised me to stop with so much sterilizing because it was beginning to be a bit tiring. I was just bursting with pride and thrilled to be a mom! I was trying to do everything right.

Visits to Parchman resumed. Aynda was about two months old when i took her to see Hekima and his Mom who met us in Mississippi. Aynda's very first introduction to her dad and her other grandmother was a most special event as expected.

Weeks later, we received a phone call informing us that my dad, in Florida, was extremely ill. My three oldest sisters, Hattie Maud Biddle, Eula May Green and Mattie Washington went to be with him. When dad had become stronger and able to travel, Mattie and her son moved him back to Milwaukee to live with her family. After a few years , he would be moved to

a nursing facility for further care. His grandchildren were able to interact with their grandfather. I would often take Aynda, my nephew, Robb and my nieces, Aisha, and Jill Strickland to visit my dad. Our family priority was to maintain strong bonds and connections for the sake of our children and future generations. That family bonding was evidenced in regular visits to Hekima for our children to make that connection with their father.

Somehow, i came up with the bright idea of applying for a teaching job at Parchman. I was never told that a teacher was needed, wanted or even if there were teachers on the farm at all. I simply assumed that there must have been some type of classes for inmates. I envisioned being able to live and work right there at Parchman near Hekima. However, when i revealed my thoughts to Hekima, he immediately and emphatically stated, "no we're not going do that!" My mom was also not in favor of the idea, so i never inquired. I returned to school to complete my graduate work. My mom took care of Aynda. I graduated with a master's degree in January of 1975. In the Milwaukee Public Schools, i was a substitute teacher temporarily until a fulltime position was available. I resumed speaking engagements, visits to Hekima, interactions with lawyers as necessary, caring for Aynda as well as full time employment. Living with my mom, she and my sisters were major help in caring for Aynda. Birda had children near Aynda's age so she spent a lot of time with them. My niece, Ronda was very helpful as well. Speaking engagements had become less frequent after Aynda was born. Aynda and i spent summers in Mississippi to be in closer proximity to Hekima while We stayed with Sister Dorothy and her daughters, in Greenwood.

In 1976, i told Hekima that i wanted he and i to be married by US Law. Hekima requested our blood tests and marriage license. I set a date of July 16 because the date had spe-

cial significance for our family. My sister, Kay Fowler, nieces Michelle Harris-Taylor, and Aisha Stricklin were born on July 16; my sister, Bernice Vaughn was wed to Sammy Vaughn on July 16. Hekima and i were wed during a three-day visit. We were transported by prison officials for our blood tests and to secure a marriage license. On July 16, 1976, our wedding was attended by Dorothy, my sister, Kay Fowler, and Hekima's mother, Olivia McClure. Dorothy made my wedding dress, We bought a cake, made a wedding dinner, and i even had a Bridal bouquet. I had to take my vows with Aynda on my hip. To minimize legal issues or obstacles to our case, I felt that it was important that our marriage be official by US law. Though We will always recognize October 1, 1970 as our official wedding date. Black Law!



The Unexpected

While Teaching in the Milwaukee Public School System, in May of 1977, we were blessed with a second pregnancy. So,

it was back to "From Conception to Birth", once again, my constant companion. My second pregnancy was reminiscent of my first, except for a slight increase in weight. I was excited about this pregnancy because i did want more children. Aynda and i talked to the baby constantly and referred to her as the "Tiny Tot." I was pleased that Aynda was involved and excited about having a sibling. We shopped for the baby together as We expressed our plans. A co-worker gave me a surprise baby shower. I took photos of my growing tummy monthly and sent them to Hekima. It was a happy time for us. Meanwhile, Parchman was cited for overcrowding and was forced to depopulate. Inmates whose sentences required that they serve time in other jurisdictions were sent to those jurisdictions. Brother Chuma had been released. Brother Karim had no federal time, but Brothers Hekima, Offaga, and Addis did. Brothers Hekima and Offaga were relocated to a federal institution in Atlanta, while Brother Addis was sent to a Federal institution in another state. My family in Georgia was hosting our family reunion in Atlanta that year, so i was able to attend the reunion, stay a few extra days then visit Hekima. My niece, Geraldine Biddle-Manson, drove Aynda and me to The Federal Penitentiary to visit Hekima. Upon arrival and entry, We were seated at a visitor's table for an unusually long time. Hekima never came out. After inquiring, i was told that Hekima was not there, that he had been transported back to Mississippi. I was blown away! It had been some time since We saw Hekima; Aynda and i eagerly anticipated seeing him once again. I later understood that after sending the Brothers out of state into Federal custody, Mississippi authorities realized that this was in error. They had our Brothers returned to Mississippi, in an effort to maintain their jurisdiction. Shocked and disheartened, Aynda and i returned to Milwaukee.

Mississippi visits resumed as i continued teaching and taking photos of my growing belly to send to Hekima. I wanted

to share as much of our family experiences with him as possible, particularly, my pregnancies. On December 22, 1977, winter break for the school system began just twenty days before our second bundle of joy, Noni Lu Crease Kanyama Norman would grace the world with her presence on January 11, 1978. I requested a leave of absence for one year, intending to return to work when Noni was a year old. I deliberately factored in sufficient time to spend with my new baby. My plan was for the girls and i to temporarily live in Mississippi to be near Hekima. When Noni was three months old, we moved to Mississippi. Sister Dorothy and Brother Offaga had gotten married and had a new baby boy, Suwadu. We moved in with Dorothy, her girls, and new baby. Noni met her dad and her other grandmother who visited while We were there.

During the summer Noni became violently ill. When i took her to the doctor, he advised me to get her back to Milwaukee immediately! I didn't waste any time, We were back in Milwaukee that evening! Kay and i took her to the Children's hospital. Noni was diagnosed with a severe ear infection. After her recovery, i decided to return to Mississippi for an extended stay. A very close friend of the family, Virgil Washington, Jr. who was like a nephew to me, as i had known him since his birth, drove the girls and i to Greenwood, Mississippi then took a flight back to Milwaukee.

When the school year started, i was hired to teach at a Catholic school. Aynda was almost four years old at the time, but administrators permitted her attendance with me. I was later called to teach at Valley State University. At that point i had to enroll Aynda in a preschool. Sister Dorothy's cousin, Miss. Callie provided care for Noni, and after school care for Aynda.

Aynda had to be transported from school every day by taxi to Miss Calli's house. I picked the girls up after work each day. A co-worker was helpful in finding an apartment for us. I purchased used furniture and Aynda, Noni and i settled into a routine schedule that included work, pre-school, babysitter, cooking, housework and most importantly our bi-weekly trips to Parchman. Our visits always included bringing food to have lunch together as a family in Hekima's shop. We even celebrated Aynda's fourth birthday with cake and ice cream. We surprised her with a new bicycle with training wheels. Gathered as a family, We were in our own little world. We managed to shut everything out with no thoughts of our overall circumstances. We cherished our precious moments of fun and family time. Hekima and i always had our private visits as well.

One Sunday, visits were canceled for reasons unbeknownst to me at that time. I had driven all the way to Parchman, but was not allowed to visit Hekima. Sad and perplexed, i drove back home. As soon as i entered the house, my phone rang. It was Hekima explaining that the visitation issue had been resolved and asked if i could make the return trip. Right away, i got back in my car and drove to Parchman. My neighbor and friend kept the girls for me. On the long drive on country roads, i was speeding and praying that i would not be stopped by police or have an accident. I arrived at Parchman so quickly that Hekima was startled. As i pulled in front of his shop, he was coming out. Hekima said, "don't you ever drive that fast again!" All i could say was, "Surprise!"

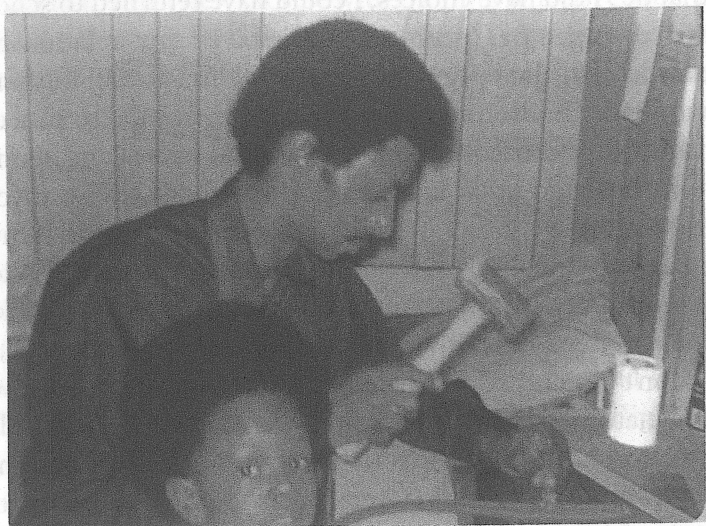
People have often asked why i decided to have children with Hekima when the reality was that he would never come home with us. My answer was generally the same; "I never entertained that thought!" It never entered my mind that he would spend the rest of his life in prison. I simply never accepted that notion, in spite of the Life sentence, plus Federal

time. In retrospect, i certainly understand the reasoning for the questions. For most people, my actions were questionable at best. Many would even go as far as to say it was bordering on insanity. Personally, the unity and bond of two people does not cease because one of you is held captive. We were not breaking up and i had no plans to leave him. I vowed to do everything in my power to help all of the Brothers gain their release. I did not choose my fate, my road map for this part of my life had been laid by the circumstances that were created by the "powers that be". I did have choices; I could have returned to school, started dating other people and dissolved my relationship. There was also the option to remain faithful to my husband, but not have children until he came home. I opted to proceed with my life. I chose to have our beautiful babies and reunite with my husband upon his release. I would not advise anyone to take the same actions as i did, that decision is one that must be made individually, based on the given circumstances. There is no way to defend my actions. All i can say is that it worked for me and my family. It was not a difficult decision for me, in fact i don't remember clearly making a decision. For me, it was just the natural order. Hekima and i were a couple. I desired to have children, my clock was ticking, and i had no idea when Hekima would be coming home. It was the right thing to do!

Baby Number Three

All was well as We lived our lives, enjoying each other as a family. Work was good, attorneys continued to expend hours and hours seeking release of the brothers. Then came the news that We would soon welcome baby number three. I continued to work at Valley State University, Aynda in preschool, Noni with the babysitter, and making our regular bi-weekly visits and whenever possible, our "three day" visits with Hekima. It was during those visits that We could really live like a family for three whole blissful days and nights.

One of the more memorable times at the three-day house was when i stayed "home" with Noni and Hekima took Aynda with him to the rodeo and he combed her hair. Well for most people that was not a big deal, but for me it was a treasured moment. i was enjoying every second of acting like We were on the outside, like that was just an everyday thing. Hekima taking Aynda on an outing, I'm sitting "home" with one baby on my lap, and one in my tummy, getting ready to prepare dinner. Oh how divine that felt!



Hekima and Aynda doing leather work in his shop at Parchman.

How strange it is that We take so much of life for granted until a drastic awakening to make us realize the value of simple things. I stand guilty of overexaggerating each of my pregnancies because i was so thankful for my babies considering the circumstances of their creation. Words are not sufficient to express the miracles of each of our beautiful little black queens. I treasured each pregnancy. The fact is, i prayed for twins or triplets with each pregnancy because of the joy and delight to

be the vessel for new life. Some people take it for granted, you get pregnant, you have a beautiful baby and you love them with all your heart, you're happy, and that's life, that's the way it's suppose to happen; but in our case it was magnified because it wasn't necessarily supposed to happen for us. In a situation such as ours, nothing is taken for granted. Now the realization that soon We would be blessed with baby number three while at one time We had no expectation of even one.

The girls and i went home during our Winter holiday break. It was wonderful to be home with our family and everyone was happy to see us. While in Milwaukee i paid a visit to the school board to inform them that i would not return to work due to my pregnancy. I submitted another leave of absence for another year. I planned to return to Milwaukee at some point, so it was necessary to inform the Board of my new plans. We had a ball in Milwaukee then returned to Greenwood and our regular routine. Life was good, work, school, babysitter, and once again, our biweekly visits. My coworkers at Valley State University gave me a nice baby shower at a local restaurant. We enjoyed our temporary stay in Mississippi. At the end of the school year, We prepared for a return to Milwaukee. Dorothy and i packed up all the children and drove to Milwaukee. Dorothy and her children visited for a few days then they returned to Mississippi. I had business to take care of, including enrolling Aynda in school and preparing myself for childbirth.

I took the girls to a Juneteenth Day celebration on third street. A rather large crowd was in attendance and as i spoke briefly with someone in the crowd, Noni walked away. I did not see her near me, as most mothers would do, i panicked! I screamed her name while looking for her among the throng. A truly frightening experience but thankfully she had not ventured far from us. I was more than pleased to encounter so many people who i had not seen in a long time and the endless

questions regarding my well-publicized experiences. Yet, after nearly losing my little girl, i was exhausted and no longer in the mood for conversation, so We headed home.

Settling in at home was easy, everyone was happy to have us back. My priority was organizing and structuring life in preparation for delivery of my baby. On August 21, 1979, our precious Chinyere, a/k/a, "Che Che the Ba-ba" entered this world on her daddy's birthday! My mom and sisters brought Aynda and Noni to the hospital to see me and the new baby, this was a new and strange experience for Noni at only 18 months old. I attempted to hug her, but she pushed away and gave me a most confused look, then looked at the baby before she returned my hug. Aynda, on the other hand was the little adult in the room since she had been there, done that.

Becoming accustomed to three little ones kept me busy, but i loved it. There was endless help from mom, sisters, and nieces. Aynda would be five years old in October, so a week after Chinyere was born, i enrolled her in my alma mater, Lloyd Street Elementary School where my siblings and i had attended and where i once taught. My doctor advised me against driving for a while. As excited as i was that Aynda was beginning school i decided to walk her to school. The walk to school was no problem. The walk back home is where the trouble started. I could barely walk because i was in so much pain. When i finally made it home, mom said to me, "Child! Didn't you know that if the doctor told you not to drive, surely she didn't want you to walk?" Resting with my feet up and a bit of TLC from mom, took care of the problem. I did not return to work until January 1980.

Hekima and i continued writing letters, mailing cassette tapes and i mailing photos of the children. We were still trying to make the best of our peculiar situation. The Attorneys

remained dedicated to our case. Once again, We were back in court based on the legal argument that Mississippi had lost jurisdiction when the Brothers were transferred out of state to a Federal penitentiary. After only a single day, Mississippi authorities realized their error. They understood that Hekima, Offaga, and Adiddis should never have been moved. They never meant for our Brothers to be a part of the depopulation program. The objective of the state of Mississippi was that our Brothers would remain behind bars until death. A serious mistake by the state of Mississippi, yet beneficial for us. Attorneys were confident that with the strength of their argument, our chances for success were increased significantly. We remained acutely aware that ultimately, We were subject to a legal system that tended to structure laws and policy to work for specific results. We depended on current laws and maintained faith that our ancestors and God were with us.

I returned to Mississippi for a hearing with Hekima's attorneys in February, 1980 in preparation for the case. Hekima had not been introduced to Chinyere, so i took her with me to meet her dad. We went to a couple of hearings, then returned to Milwaukee. Hearings continued for several weeks before there was success. Attorneys won based on the jurisdictional argument. Hekima and Offaga were returned to federal prison in Atlanta where they would remain until paroled. The combined times served from the first time that they were in Federal custody until they were parolled all counted as Federal time. It was now clear that Hekima would be coming home soon, but We had no idea when. I thought that perhaps he would be assigned to a halfway house as he had mentioned. At last, We were provided with a definite release date! No indication of a halfway house. We lived in the upstairs flat of the duplex that mom owned. Excitement filled the air as preparations were underway for Hekima's return. On the day of Hekima's release, Brother Yusufu (Joe Brooks) picked him up and drove him to the bus station.

I met Hekima at the bus station early on an August morning in 1980.

Homecoming



It was as if the entire Black community gathered to celebrate Hekima's homecoming! Everyone was genuinely happy for us. Mainly because this day was never expected. My family gifted us with a weekend at the Sheriton Hotel in Milwaukee. It was indeed an exhilarating time for us. My nephew, Marvin Hicks ('ML'), drove us to Charlotte, North Carolina to visit Hekima's family. His mom and her husband held a cookout in Hekima's honor with many of his relatives in attendance. At home there were a variety of speaking engagements, community awards and celebrations for Hekima. A constant flow of visitors and invitations kept us busy as well. One special treat for us was Sister Angela Davis came to town, and We went to see her. The group of us spoke at length and in detail of our struggles as a people. We had an opportunity to sit and talk because there was only a small group of us. Aynda and other children proudly serenaded Angela Davis, singing, "We Are Family."

The children were so excited and proud of themselves for singing to her.

However, settling down to our being reunited was not without problems and pain. Adjustment to this new situation presented challenges.

Hekima began employment at Triple O and his supervisor was Brother Larry Harwell, director. I returned to teaching. Aynda was enrolled at Sister Clara Muhammad Elementary School while mom took care of the babies. Hekima began complaining about everything! Like why the children did not have more Black books, the way i disciplined the children, etc. His behavior was totally unexpected. I couldn't believe how he acted. I was so disappointed in him. I had envisioned a blissful reunion with his full appreciation for a beautiful family, a warm comfortable home, a relatively new car in an environment where he was loved. Everything was in place for him, all he had to do was to settle in. After all that i had experienced over nine years to make a home for us, i expected more. I had to come to grips with the fact that my dreams were mine. I dreamed of what i desired of life, devoid of Hekima's input. I had no idea what Hekima's dreams and goals were. It had become obvious that our desires were not in sync. I had to engage in extensive soul searching to find myself again. I had allowed myself to become lost in the situation. I had become a stranger to myself after expending time, effort, and energy to motherhood, being a good wife and a Sister-warrior. There was nothing left for me. I doubted whether i could go on like that. I thought 'If this is the way life is going to be with him, i don't know if i want it'. Breaking up with Hekima would have been painful and embarrassing. I would believe myself to be a failure. I sincerely loved Hekima, but i had no idea what move to make. I was in the midst of a serious dilemma. Perhaps all he needed was time to adjust after all those years of confine-

ment. Then, i wondered if it may have been more beneficial for him to have gone to a halfway house to become reacclimated. My thoughts were dominated by the sheer uncertainty of our relationship.

I was happy to have Hekima home, but i was not generally happy after waiting nine years, giving birth to three beautiful babies, relocating to Mississippi for a while to be near him, and spending most of my money on airline tickets , and making a home for us. I felt that i deserved more, that the children deserved more. We moved on as a family as best We could but it wasn't easy.

Life was not all bad. there were some pleasant times as a family, and We did lots of things together. There were adjustments all around, not only for Hekima and me. Our girls had to adjust to the presence of two parents rather than just mom. We took Aynda to get a Library card and instructed her to write her name as Aynda Norman rather than Aynda Kanyama. That really rocked her little world! She had determined with certainty that We were wrong and seriously challenged us. We explained to her what "slave names, and Free names" meant to us as African people. Nothing We said was satisfactory to her. We further stressed to her that this society was laced with contradictions; and that was just one of them. There were issues like that, that i had not confronted or dealt with, with the children.

Decision to Move South

During Hekima's incarceration, We had numerous conversations regarding moving south when he came home. If We moved south, i favored Georgia because i had family in Georgia. We decided on Atlanta. For nearly the entire first year after his release, Hekima was focused on the varied details for our

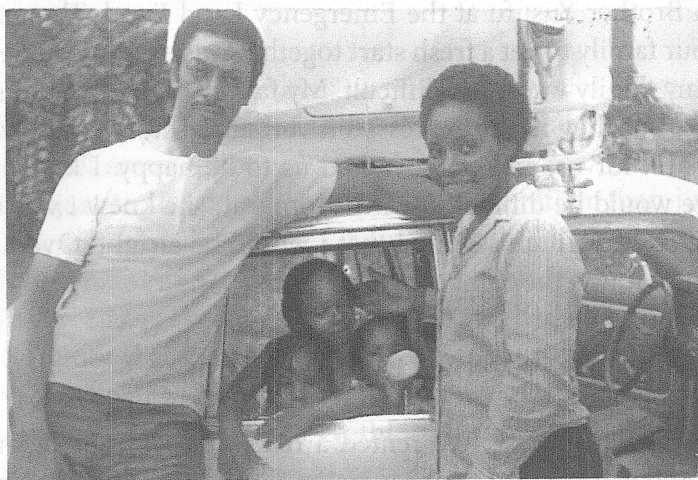
move. We sent employment resumes and visited Atlanta for interviews and preliminary details. An RNA Brother Akinshegun, owned a house in Southwest Atlanta that he offered to rent to us. We accepted the offer and secured a place of residence. While attending an RNA meeting in Chicago, Sister Latifah Carter, while holding her baby girl Ayo, greeted us and introduced herself. She lived in Atlanta and was aware that We were moving there. She offered to babysit for us if We had need while in Atlanta. We spoke at length and exchanged phone numbers for contact. Things were falling into place. We had living space and a babysitter! Hekima secured employment with Brother Yusufu at the Emergency Land Fund. The move for our family to get a fresh start together was exciting but leaving my family was most difficult. My family did not want us to move, but they never expressed it verbally. They wanted what was best for us, and they wanted us to be happy. I knew the move would be difficult for my mom but, she knew i was her rebel child and felt satisfied that i would be alright. Overall, i thought it was the right move.

Atlanta, Here We Come

August of 1981, We rented a truck, packed our belongings and were on our way. My sister, Kay Fowler and my niece, Jill Strickland-Denson and our girls rode with me in the car, while Hekima and another brother drove the truck. Neither Kay nor i were familiar with interstate highway driving, so We trailed the brothers. All was well until we lost sight of the truck. We drove on until We were too weary to proceed. We stopped and checked into a hotel. No cell phones then, but we managed to communicate through my Mom. We called home and Hekima had also called my Mom and left a message. We met up with the Brothers again the following morning to resume our journey. The remainder of the trip was without incident. Immediately upon our arrival in Atlanta, We moved into our

new residence on Wichita Drive, SW. Atlanta. We were welcomed by several RNA Brothers and Sisters, my niece, Geraldine Biddle-Manson, my uncle, Artist Colbert, my cousin Ray Colbert, and other relatives. I met neighbors who would later become close friends. Neighbors, Jean Latimer, Jackie, and Ray Roberson were all helpful to us in settling into our new surroundings. Kay, Jill, and the brother who helped Hekima drive, stayed a few days before returning to Milwaukee.

Just Us



Now it was just us. The girls and I missed home. They cried daily about how they missed everyone. We were on the phone constantly talking to relatives. Hekima tried his best to make us comfortable, but without success. Finally, Hekima said to me, "I know that the girls feel sad, and are missing everyone, but you should be helping me make them feel better and adjust, but you are acting just like them; help me." It was no easy task for me to process what he said. I spoke to mom and to my sisters every day. I visited often with my sisters Hattie M. Biddle and Eula M. Green and their families in Reynolds, Georgia. My

cousin, Ray Colbert visited a few times. My cousin, Freeman Knolton and his wife Jan and their children stopped by often until they moved to Fort valley, Georgia. Sister Latifa proved to be much more than a babysitter, she was a great friend. Latifa was also active in the community and introduced us to a lot of wonderful people, places, and events. The abundance of help and support simplified life for us in Atlanta.

School Time

Just weeks after arriving in Atlanta, Chinyere and Hekima celebrated their birthday on August 21. We had a party for Che Che who was celebrating two years of life. My cousin, Jan brought her two youngest children, Freemona and Sequoia Knolton. The party was small since We had not been in Atlanta for very long. Moving right along, only days later We enrolled Aynda in Arkwright Elementary school as a second grad student. Noni, Chinyere and i walked Aynda back and forth to school each day until about a month later when i was teaching once again. I was teaching at Birney Elementary School in Smyrna, Georgia, which was about a 35-minute drive. Sister Latifa looked after all the girls. Hekima and i drove Aynda to school and Latifa picked her up. With only one car, Hekima drove me to and from work until i later connected with a co-worker to ride with. Eventually, We borrowed money from my sister, Bernice Vaughn for a down payment on a new car. A second car made life much easier. In December We attended local pre-Kwanzaa programs prior to heading home for winter break. Latifa was sure to include Aynda and Noni in some of the programs.

We drove home in our new Ford Escort. It was a severely cold winter, by the time We reached Illinois, temperatures were well below zero. The car was freezing up and would only move very slowly. Hekima wanted to walk to a gas station to get help,

but i was too afraid, not only for him out in the cold, but for us left alone in the darkness and blinded by the snow. I cried and begged him not to leave us. He got back in the car. We drove along very slowly, but We made it! We made it to a gas station and Hekima was able to address the problem with the car. We made it to Milwaukee. Back to great times with family and friends loads of presents, great food, and togetherness. We remained in Milwaukee for almost two weeks. Thankfully, the drive back to Atlanta was without incident. Back to work, school, and our regular routines.

I taught fifth grade my first year at Birney, then taught Chapter One, reading and math, which was a remedial program. The school was predominately white when i began. There was only one other Black teacher at Birney, the Music teacher. There were no Black children at first, but that changed slowly over time. I taught there for five years. At times it was emotionally draining. I recall one parent asking me if i had a degree. "No, they just let me do this" was my sarcastic retort, then added, "yeah, i have a couple degrees." I did experience several racial encounters, but all things considered, it was a decent experience. But after five years, i was ready to leave. When i left Birney, there were four Black teachers on staff and several Black students.

After living in Atlanta for a year, We enrolled the children in Florence Jackson Academy, a private school. The girls had looked forward to attending that school. Throughout the summer prior to school opening, when our family passed by the school, We peered into windows in anticipation of their enrollment. On the day of their enrollment, they were full of excitement! Che Che was in pre-kindergarten class with 3-year-olds Noni was in kindergarten class with 5-year-olds (though she was only four and a half) and Aynda was in third grade. The girls liked the school as well as the teachers. Noni even told me,

"Mommy, I love you so much! I love you almost as much as I love Miss Gains" (her teacher). I laughed and said, "then i know i am really loved." Che Che's teacher provided after school care for us, and even watched the girls on weekends, when Hekima and i enjoyed a night out. Each of them had a terrific first year. To evidence our full parental support, Hekiman and i attended every school program and event. My sister, Kay was additional support when she moved to Atlanta to live with us. Hekima and i became friends with Mrs. Gains and her husband. The girls were doing very well academically and socially, and the programs were the best! All was well until the day that i lost my dad. Another trip to Milwaukee for his funeral. This was the first loss of a loved one for the girls.

During the summer of our third year in Atlanta and the second year at Florence Jackson Academy for the girls, We bought our first home. We were settled in before school started. The children were overjoyed with our new home. Especially because it had a swimming pool. Aynda and Noni had swimming lessons when We first moved to Atlanta and were both excellent swimmers. Although Chinyere had swimming lesson too, she learned to swim much later. The swimming lesson did help her to overcome a fear of water and she finally did learn to swim in our new pool. Aynda taught several of the neighborhood children to swim in weekly classes in our pool. All was fine for the family!

Hekima was now employed by an office supply company, i returned to work at Birney, and the girls returned to Florence Jackson Academy. Aynda had a new teacher, and things were not going very well. As the year progressed, her relationship with that teacher deteriorated. I attended numerous meetings and conferences with both the teacher and principal to no avail. Aynda would often come home upset and the sparkle in her eyes had dissipated. Finally, she reached the point where

she told me pleadingly, that she did not want to go to school! Nearly in tears, i told her, "Baby, just go today, and i promise you this will be your last day at that school." I went to work but left early to withdraw Aynda from Florence Jackson Academy. I enrolled her in Continental Colony, a neighborhood school. Noni and Chinyere remained at Florence Jackson Academy since they were doing well and satisfied with the school and their teachers.

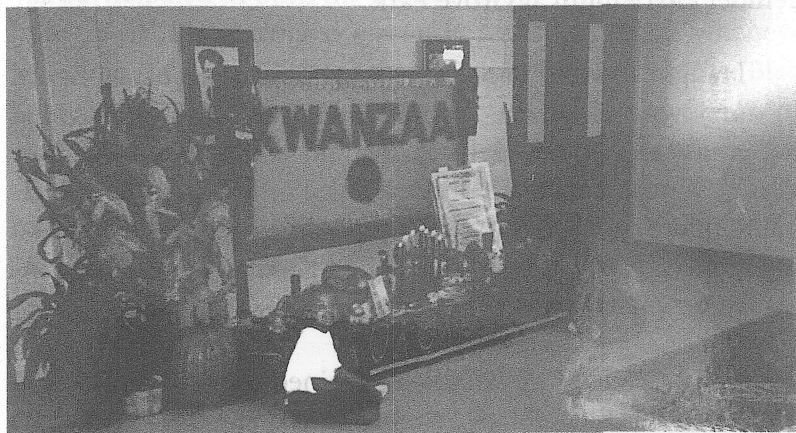
When the school year ended, Noni graduated from first grade, Chinyere from kindergarten. Then We decided that all three girls should be in one school, and We enrolled both girls in Continental Colony with Aynda. Because of her age, Chinyere was placed back kindergarten. A major setback that rendered her to a state of extreme boredom. Academically advanced, Che would complete the kindergarten assignments ahead of her classmates, then start talking to other students, which became another classroom issue altogether. Noni was having problems because her small motor skills had not developed as the other second graders, but by January she was fine. They attended Continental Colony until they each graduated from fifth grade.

Hekima's stepfather, Samuel McClure, passed away. We traveled to Charlotte, North Carolina for the funeral. The second experience of death for the girls. A lesson for them and for all of us is that the only constant in life is change.

After five years at Birney Elementary, i resigned to begin teaching in Atlanta Public Schools. My first assignment was at Grove Park Elementary School. This school was all Black students and majority of Black teachers. I taught third grade along with three other teachers. I became close friends with one teacher in particular, Mrs. Janice King. The four of us worked well together. I can recall occasions when preparing

for a special program, some children were unable to obtain clothes or materials required for a program, We would make sure that everyone had whatever was needed. Although quite a different experience than at Birney, i was more comfortable at Grove Park.

I introduced Kwanzaa to Grove Park Elementary. We had hosted Kwanzaa celebrations in our home since our second year in Atlanta. I approached the principal, Mrs. Silvia Jones with the prospect of teaching the entire school about holidays around the world with a focus on Kwanzaa. I created a December lesson plan entitled, "Winter Holidays Around the World." I submitted an outline of the lesson plans as well as all related information and materials to the principal. She was very receptive to the idea. I advised her that the project would be a "hands on" experience for students and teachers, and that i would invite guest to help facilitate. She gave me free reign but stipulated that i was to accomplish everything on my own time. I spent lunch time and whatever time i could to work with the children and did whatever i had to do in preparation. I purchased all decorations and Kwanzaa paraphernalia as well as decorated after school. Thankfully, a couple of other teachers did lend a hand.



The first school day in December, i set up a table in the corridor with the beautiful Kwanzaa symbols, African artifacts and decorations displayed. We announced over the school intercom that We will be celebrating holidays around the world with a focus on our very own holiday, Kwanzaa. For the next two or so days, several students and i began presenting limited information about various winter holidays in other countries. Then it was time to introduce Kwanzaa; We explain that Kwanzaa was our own holiday. We gave basic information about Kwanzaa including the seven principles and each meaning. We went to each classroom teaching Kwanzaa songs. The last seven days prior to winter break, the entire student body and staff participated in our seven-day Kwanzaa celebration. We always had great parent participation, especially on the day of Kuumba, the sixth day, the day of the feast. Parents and teachers provided delicious food for the Karamu (Feast). The Kwanzaa table was strategically located in view of anyone as they entered or exited the buliding. At the end of each school day, We gathered around the Kwanzaa table to light a candle for the Kwanzaa principle of that day. Candles were not extinguished until everyone had been dismissed and had observed the sacred display. The principal was so pleased with the Kwanzaa program, that Kwanzaa was incorporated into the annual December curriculum at Grove Park.

I taught at Grove Park for five years and each year climaxed in our joyous Kwanzaa celebration. While i always provided the Kwanzaa symbols decorations and materials for the programs, When i decided to leave Grove Park, i asked the principal to purchase essential Kwanzaa paraphernalia. She honored my request. I am happy to report that Kwanzaa programs continued for many years, after i left.

In 1992, i left Grove Park and joined the teaching staff at Venetian Hills Elementary School. Once again, my lesson plans

were approved for the "Winter Holidays Around the World" at Venetian Hills. As at Grove Park, the Kwanzaa program was an overwhelming success with students and faculty. Circumstances remained the same. I was limited to my own time and resources. Intercom announcements went much smoother with assistance from a third grader, Asantewa Sunni-Ali, daughter of Iya Fulani and Baba Bilal who was already familiar with the annual celebration of Kwanzaa. Asantewa was a great backup. i was very proud of Asantewe and the staff was so impressed by her superb command of Swahili terms and the confidence of her delivery. Kwanzaa program daily activities and scheduling were practically identical to the celebration at Grove Park. The Kwanzaa program remained an annual tradition through my retirement in 2007 as well as years that follow.

In addition to the Kwanzaa programs, i organized the annual Black History Month events. My personal priority was for our children to learn of the notable persons, places and historical achievements that were not generally taught to them. I prominently displayed images and posters of significant historical relevance to our Black students. Hekima and our girls were present at most of my programs. Most times, Iyalosha Fulani and Baba Bilal Sunni Ali and Iyalosha Kahina Gahfoor-Shabazz participated in both the Black History Month and Kwanzaa programs. I encouraged community participation whenever possible. It was important that i taught from a positive Black perspective which made it necessary to explain positions that conflicted with generally accepted ideologies. Black History month presented a most opportune time to expose the entire student body to information that i was teaching to students in my classroom.

Profound Changes Taking Place

The family was excited when Aynda graduated from high school in June of 1992 and left for college that fall. I began teaching reading on a part time basis at Perimeter College. Hekima was diagnosed with glaucoma and declared legally blind yet maintained a decent level of vision. He was even able to drive for many years following the diagnosis. We returned to Milwaukee every summer and visited Hekima's mom in Charlotte, North Carolina on holidays. My mom moved to Decatur, Georgia and lived in an apartment at a property managed by my sister, Kay. Later moving to Reynolds, Georgia with my sisters Eula and Hattie. We visited mom often and were happy that she was close by.

In July of 1994, mom passed away. I had experienced death in my family a few times, but i was not prepared this time. I suppose no one can ever prepare themselves to lose a parent. Losing dad was painful but it had been expected, in that he had been ill for a while. Mom had been ill also, but i was not ready to let her go. I really needed my mom. I felt really, lost and alone. Aspects of my marriage still felt a bit disjointed, but i had learned to live with it. I felt as though something was missing. Moving on...

Change is constant! Not long after mom's passing, We learned that Aynda was pregnant. She was in her second year of college. She and her boyfriend, Bobby Jackson had been dating since high School, but her pregnancy was totally un-

expected. Our first grandchild, Ebony Jackson was born June 20, 1995. The day that We were to pick Aynda and Ebony up from the hospital was the same day that Noni was scheduled for an appointment with the pediatrician before starting college. At the conclusion of Noni's appointment, i told the receptionist that i wished to speak with the Pediatrician. The receptionist responded, "oh, she wants to speak with you also." That is when the doctor informed me that Noni was pregnant! The same day that We were picking Aynda and Ebony up from the hospital! Wow! Yea! I must have blacked out. All i know is that the receptionist called Aynda and asked if Noni needed a place to live. She called back a few times to be sure that no one had been hurt. I have no idea what i said, but it must not have been pleasant. This was my little girl! At least Aynda was twenty years old! I got over that shock, somehow. Anyway, my precious little grandson was born on December 30th, the 5th day of Kwanzaa which is Nia (Purpose) only six months after Ebony. I could not keep my hands off my new grand babies. They were so precious. I was 'stupid' in love with them both! Ebony was our first grandchild, and Tony was the first male child to be born into the Kanyama clan! Those babies were our source of joy!

We hosted annual Kwanzaa celebrations and usually chose a day that fell on the weekend. The day that Tony was born, We had already planned to have a Kwanzaa celebration in our home. I was at the hospital with Noni, Tony Morrow Sr. (Tony's dad) and Tony's other grandmother, Mrs. Morrow. Mrs. Morrow told me to go on home to be with my Kwanzaa guests because she and her son would stay with Noni and little Tony. Arriving home, the house was indeed full of friends and family ready for a grand Kwanzaa Celebration! I announced that Noni had given birth to a fine baby boy! In honor of his birth, We will be hosting Kwanzaa each year on December 30th. Nia.

Noni and Aynda both returned to school and graduated, followed by Chinyere a few years later. All three girls graduated from Morris Brown College. Aynda moved out when Ebony was about a year old, but Noni and Tony stayed with us. I still got to spend quality time with Ebony, and i spent every day with little Tony. Ebony and Tony attended the same preschools, it was my job to pick them up every day. I so enjoyed my little grandchildren.

On December 26,1999, the first day of Kwanzaa (Umoja), Aynda wed Bobby Jackson in a beautiful ceremony. Our two grandchildren, Aynda's goddaughter, Tiera Nelson and her godson, Isaiah Ghafoor were part of the wedding. The family continued with active community involvement. In 2001 Aynda and Bobby blessed us with our second granddaughter, Mahogany Jackson.

Change remained constant. Hekima developed "A Blueprint for Functional Unity" through an effort that would be named, The African Community Center for Unity and Self-Determination. A scientific approach to build functional unity among our people. He initially shared the concept while We were in Milwaukee, without success. He later attempted once again to implement ACCUSD in Atlanta. Once again, nothing materialized. Finally, in January of 2003, Hekima called the family together and said, "We are going to do this!" It took off this time. The Board of Directors was comprised of Hekima, Mama Njere Alghanee, Mzee Tate, Akbar Imhotep, and me. The first item of structure involved legal matters. The highlight of the year though, was the birth of our fourth grandchild, Millitta Jackson. Two little ones in our lives once again.

In 2004 We formed the Unity Council, of the ACCUSD with our first four members: Iya Fulani Sunni-Ali, Baba Kweku Andoh, Brother Peter Marc Brown, and Brother Kenneth Za-

kee. The next year in our community election, four additional members joined the Unity Council. Annual elections continued until 2006, when the Unity Council consisted of twelve functioning members. Meanwhile in 2005 we welcomed a fifth grandchild and our second grandson, Anwar Kamal Jackson. We were all so excited and happy to have another boy, but Bobby and his father were just ecstatic!

By 2007, the first members of the Unity Council had served their three-year terms and four new community members were elected. As Unity Council members completed their terms of service, they were honored with an appreciation banquet, and newly elected members introduced. The entire Kanyama family participates and supports the ACCUSD. Our passion to achieve a better life for ourselves and our people, is expressed in our affirmation which is recited at all meetings.

Functional Unity Affirmation

I affirm that Functional Unity is the systematic way by which we will harness and direct the awesome powers and diverse resources of our people for self-determination.

Ase

I affirm my conviction that the system of Functional Unity is absolutely necessary for the liberation and empowerment of our people. "Freedom is something you take with your own hands, or you don't have it" Dr. John Henrik Clark.

Ase

I affirm my commitment to help build, maintain and defend the System of Functional Unity for the benefit of myself, my family, for our people and for future generations.

Ase

I affirm my commitment to work with brothers and sisters to build strong, caring and clearly defined collectives as units of the Functional Unity Process.

Ase

I affirm my commitment to hold myself and all members of the African collective to high standards of accountability.

Ase

I affirm my commitment to be patient with myself and with others and to be available to the collective in working through problems and contradictions which are a natural part of the dynamics of our struggle and life.

Ase

I affirm that we will have victory! Overcoming all challenges and establishing our firm dominion over ourselves, our lands and our glorious future.

Ase! Ase! Ase oooo....

By Baba Hekima A. Kanyama

"change"

The changes were indeed constant. Hekima's mom came to live with us when Ebony and Tony were about four years old. She was present when the other grandchildren were born and provided that loving interaction of a great grandparent. She was very active, she went to most of the community events

that We attended. After visiting several churches, she joined Red Oak Baptist Church. My grandson, Tony and i accompanied her to Red Oak Baptist for almost a year when i decided to join. In December, i introduced the church to Kwanzaa. I lead the youth in presenting the Kwanzaa program that became an annual church tradition.

Based on the success and overwhelming appreciation for the celebration of Kwanzaa by the church members, i asked the Pastor if We might bring that same energy and excitement with Black History Month programs in February. The pastor loved the idea and i proceeded to organize a series of Black History Month programs that culminated in a special extravaganza on the last Sunday of February. It was emphasized to the congregation that Black History Month activities would be educational and designed to impart knowledge, not merely to entertain or dramatize history. We stressed the importance of full participation and contribution no matter the skills and talent levels were essential to success of the Black History Month programs. As expected, congregational involvement increased significantly. A most memorable lecture delivered by the pastor's wife, Mother Doris Freeman focused on the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, when several European countries met to colonize Africa by dividing Africa and each European country laid claim to 'their' territory.

After years of being the driving force behind Black History Month events, congregational support and input increased to the incorporation of monthly Black history celebrations. A monthly Youth Sunday service featured a "Moment In Black History" where two students read their Black history reports. Typically, i provided sources of information for the students and the youth director selected and prepped the students. A fifth Sunday of any month was designated 'Senior' Sunday when senior members of the congregation delivered a Black

History report. Again, i provided resource materials, but often seniors spoke based on their own research as i strongly encouraged all to do. The importance of historical as well as current issues was evident in all presentations. Black history reports and presentation would invoke discussions that offered ideas and suggestions on improving conditions and empowering Black people. Black History programs were impactful for all, especially for our youth. I am pleased with the enthusiasm and willingness to do the necessary research that was displayed overall.

Constant change. Near the end of my formal teaching career, i underwent tear duct surgery in October of 2006. Because of complications following the surgery, i was out of work until mid-January of 2007. Although i had accumulated sufficient sick days that i could have stayed out for the remainder of the school year, i could not leave my students hanging like that. I returned to work in mid-January and retired in May, at the close of the school year. Following my retirement party, my sisters, Doris Griffin, Bernice Vaughn, Birda Lockhart II, and i went on a cruise to the Bahamas. I was more than ready for re-tirement. However, i did return to substitute teaching, mainly at Venetian Hills. I continued working with the African Community Centers for Unity and Self-Determination along with my husband and family. I served on the Board as Treasurer, and as Chairperson of the Banquet team, among other efforts. Noni assumed an active role in the ACCUSD as a 'Unity Build-er' she gives it her all.

In 2007, Noni was married(After earning her MBA,2004). In 2008, she gave birth to a beautiful baby girl, Annatia Bennett, our sixth grandchild! I especially recall when Annatia was only two days old, her dad saying, "and she is smart too!" I laughed so hard, thinking, "how can you tell if a two-day old baby is smart". His conjecture proved true. Annatia really is smart, just as all our grandchildren.

children. Once again, We were thrilled with the addition of another beautiful grandchild to devote our time and love to. Tony was especially excited to have a sibling.

In 2005, my girls and i organized a wonderful sixtieth surprise birthday party for Hekima. My sisters and brother-in law came from Milwaukee as well as those from Reynolds, Georgia. Brother President Imari, Brother Chokwe and several of our comrades arrived for the occasion. Local comrades included Iya Kahina Ghafoor,-shabazz, Iya Fulani and Baba Balil sunni-Ali and their children, Mama Njere Alghanee , the Honorable Moreen Malone and many more. The gathering was not merely a party, it was also a political expression.

In the summer of 2008, I was invited to attend a 'Grandmother's Conference', in Ghana, West Africa hosted by Mama Kali Sichen. I took our oldest grandchildren, Antonio Morrow and Ebony Jackson who were both twelve years old. Ebony turned thirteen as we were in flight. We were in Ghana for a month venturing through the country learning, shopping, taking in the magnificent sights of Africa, partaking of Ghanaian foods and delicacies, and having a great time with our African brothers and sisters. The final two days, however, were not fun at all. The day before we were to leave, i contracted Malaria. We had attended a ceremony in Accra, "The Unveiling of the Wall" a visually stunning wall upon which the names of notable Africans of the continent as well as the diaspora had been inscribed. We met Kwame Nkrumah's grandson and Marcus Garvey's son, Julius Garvey. We attended a private reception in their honor the following day in Cape Coast. Although i had begun feeling ill, i was determined to be there. I did go but i was too ill to appreciate being there. A doctor was present who made the malaria diagnosis and even obtained medication for me. I was relieved that at least my grandchildren were able to enjoy the festivities.

When the reception ended, we returned to our apartment. I was still extremely sick and had been advised by the doctor and everyone else not to travel the next evening. I did not heed the warnings. I was sick all night long, but i forced myself to prepare to travel. Our flight was scheduled to depart from Ghana the following evening. Initially, i had made lunch and dinner plans in Accra since our flight was not until 10:00 p.m. but canceled both engagements. A taxi drove us from Cape Coast to the airport in Accra. I needed the assistance of a wheelchair at each airport for the entire trip home. The medication began to take effect by the next evening. I still did not try to eat anything because i was unable to keep anything on my stomach. The trip home seemed like forever, but We finally made it. I recovered over the next few days.

Back in the states, our community efforts continued. Aynda home schooled her oldest daughter Ebony for middle school, then opened her own high school, "My Way Academy" in 2008 as Ebony was prepared for high school. In 2013, in conjunction with Ebony's graduation ceremony, much to my surprise, the school was renamed, "Tamu Sana Kanyama Preparatory School." I was honored and rendered speechless, having the school named for me. Her school fits into our lives perfectly in its dedication and commitment to serving our community. I make every effort to remain actively and creatively in support of the school.

Noni taught high school for the Atlanta Board of Education for a while, by 2010 she had earned her PhD. She opened "The Core Total Body and Salon Spa" in 2013, where she offers a variety of herbs, products and information that is vital to maintain optimal health. The spa has hosted and sponsored a variety of community events. I enjoy the benefits of relaxing massages, as well as the manicures and pedicures. Most significant to our family, The Core hosts, The Chevy_1K A.T.M. Resource Center, a non-profit founded in honor of our risen grandson Antonio .

Chinyere is a Fiduciary financial Advisor and has opened her own business, "Sovereign Financial", specializing in Financial Planning and Insurance services. An arm of Sovereign Financial, "The Bridge", is a financial accountability coaching company. Just as her sisters' endeavors, Chinyere's business is African-centered. Company services are available to anyone but specifically targets the needs and concerns of Our community. Aside from her own business, Chinyere worked for several years alongside her dad on the Board of Us Lifting Us Co-operative and continues to lend her support.

In a long overdue and well-deserved break from seemingly non-stop community projects and work, in 2010, Hekima and i went on a Bahamas cruise for our fortieth anniversary. Indescribable pleasure! Family and community service brought us a level of joy and satisfaction, but this special escape was just for the two of us. This was a rare moment to be cherished. Though our children were grown, We always had some of the them or the grandchildren at our house and Hekima's mom also lived with us, this offered minimal time for private moments. Despite our busy lives, We were committed to keeping our traditional Friday evening "dinner dates".

The ACCUSD began to realize tremendous growth and expansion in Atlanta. Quarterly assemblies are well attended, with interesting and relevant topics and speakers like Rev. Joseph Lowery of the SCLC. Our dedication to the ACCUSD has been hard work, but it has indeed been a labor of love. In the summer of 2010, We experienced an unfortunate loss. Mama Njere Alghanee, one of the founding members passed. She meant so much to many of us. A righteous Sister who was dedicated to her family, her people, and to humanity. We added Board members and have lost others. Our struggle continues.

The ACCUSD has given birth to several great community programs. Our basic plan for the empowerment of the African (Black) community worldwide is the 10-10-50 plan. We believe that there are lots of organizations, institutions and businesses that are doing positive work for the upliftment of our people, and they need help. We ask each person of African descent who is concerned about our plight, to make a conscious effort to choose one such group to support, using our Basic Plan, 10-10-50:

10 - Committee a minimum of 10 hours per month of your time to your chosen group.

10 - Donate \$10.00 dollars per month to that group.

50 - Redirect a minimum of \$50 dollars per month that you are already spending and spend it with a Black owned business.

Inform the business of our mission and the importance of reciprocation in order that our efforts be achieved. Black businesses must offer quality products and services.

The ACCUSD developed the Elder Council, which successfully solved several disputes in the Atlanta area. In 2011, Hekima and others established a study group whose objective was to create an economic formula designed to empower our people. In 2012, Us Lifting Us (ULU), an international economic cooperative for Black people was born out of the ACCUSD. My entire family is involved in the co-op. All six of our grandchildren own units in Us Lifting Us. Then, sadly in 2012, we lost Hekima's mom. She was a strong community activist in addition to being active in church until her transition. The children surely miss their last great grandparent.

In July of 2013, Hekima was involved in a near fatal car accident. It was at this point that i finally gave up substitute teaching. Hekima suffered several broken bones including his hip and shoulder. The car was so badly damaged, that Aynda would not even show us a photo of it. Hekima was hospitalized for two weeks and in rehabilitation for two weeks. I was with him the entire time except for the last couple of days in rehab because i had much to do in preparation for his return home. Thankfully, Hekima fully recovered. He was determined to move on with his life!

In 2016, there was yet another loss to the community when Iya Fulani Sunni-Ali transitioned. A tremendous loss to her family, the community and for me as i had lost a personal "sister friend".

In 2017, Us Lifting Us Economic Co-operative opened "Café ULU", a coffee shop on Sylvan Road in Atlanta. We expended significant amount of time, effort, and finances into Café ULU. Despite carefully detailed business plans and ideas, there was insufficient traffic to sustain the business. Café ULU closed in 2019.

In 2017, Dr. Doris Derby, local activist, organizer, professor, and renowned artist, participated in "Journey To Freedom", A Freedom Park Pathway Public Art Project, in Atlanta Georgia. Dr. Derby's photographs in the project, depicted in 2 imposing wall murals, illustrate the diverse roles women played during the struggle for freedom. Moreover, the murals celebrate the numerous contributions women made to the Civil Rights Movement, past and present. Her extensive collection of photos presented in the project on Freedom Parkway, includes a photo of Iya Fulani Sunni Ali and me.

On August 11, 2018, the most tragic and unimaginable incident devastated us! I received the most dreaded phone call that a parent can ever get! Noni called to tell me that her son, Antonio Morrow, Jr. had been murdered! It sent pain through my soul. Words are insufficient to describe the pain! The family was in shock. I hurt for my grandson who would never live out his years and i wonder what his last thoughts were. He did not deserve to die as he did. Tony was raised in a family that stressed the importance of community and was striving to make a difference; his foundation was laid. He cared about our community and the world. He may have chosen his own lane to fight in to make his contribution. He took a stance in resisting gang affiliations and spoke through his music against the ills in our community. I hurt for Noni because i know how much she loves him and her expectations for him. It is still difficult for me to look at her at times because i know that she is full of hurt. I hurt for his little sister who adores him and will now have to grow up without her big brother; I hurt for his aunts, his cousins, his grandfather, his father and all who love him. I also hurt for myself as he is constantly in my thoughts. I miss my grandson terribly! No family should ever have to endure this type of pain!

2020

2020 has proven to be a most unusual year. Not only for us but for the entire world. The COVID-19 virus arrived in January 2020, so We have been told. In February of 2020, Corona Virus dominated all media sources. Then, in March, the wearing of masks, social distancing, shut down of gathering places and hand-washing and other health protocols were instituted as advised by the scientists. This pandemic is the worse one in a hundred years. COVID is responsible for countless deaths worldwide and more than five hundred thousand lives in America and counting! The pandemic has truly altered our

lives. Although not on total lock down at present, We must remain conscious of protecting ourselves. On the other hand, there are those who believe COVID to be a hoax and refuse to wear masks or conform to restrictions designed to prevent the spread of the virus. As fate would have it, i contracted the virus in August of 2020. First in my family to contract Corona virus. A most unpleasant experience, but i am grateful to have fully recovered. I credit the substantial care and assistance of family, friends, and community for restoration of my health! Even natural health practitioners offered healthy suggestions and advice. Only months after my own bout with COVID-19, Ebony was placed in isolation for a few weeks due to the virus. Thankfully, she was also able to recover from this dreadful pandemic. COVID-19 has forever altered our lives and daily activities.

Aside from trauma of immeasurable loss of life in the pandemic, police killings of Black people across the nation remains an issue that all of us must collectively end. 2020 is a year that some would like to forget, yet lessons well learned.

Hekima and i had plans for celebration of our fiftieth anniversary on October 1, 2020. COVID-19 obliterated those plans completely. On October 1, 2020, our girls organized a Face Book Live celebration for us with photos of us over the years. October 1st has come and gone; we celebrated in our own way. To our surprise, three wonderful friends, Mama Kahina Gahfoor-Shabazz, Mama Kanika Taylor, and Mama Jerri Gains-Abdallah decided that the online event was nice, but they felt that 50 years of togetherness, deserved that and more! Despite Coronavirus, they presented us with the most beautiful anniversary dinner party. Just a small gathering whereby We could practice social distancing, and everyone wore masks. Both the interior and exterior of our home was lavishly decorated. Delicious food and special deserts had been prepared

with meticulous care. Topped off with a celebratory champagne toast. Hekima and i appreciated the thoughtful and sincere demonstration of love!

Ours has been an amazing journey. Our lives have been anything but boring or mundane. We have experienced struggles in our marriage just as other couples, but We have held it together for fifty years and counting. Our marriage has been and continues to be undergirded by our love and commitment to each other; to family and to our people, African People worldwide. We have also experienced difficult times in community work. We have met with gross disappointments in our lives. There is one pain in particular, the loss of my grandson, that i will carry inside me for the rest of my life; Yet, a harsh reality that i am forced to live with. However, my motto is, "you've got to live until you die", So why not live doing what you love and are committed to. Our commitment to each other, our family and to our people is unshakable. We still have a lot more living, a lot more loving, and a lot more work to do; God willing. I can assure you that for as long as we live, we will be working on behalf of our family and our people.

How would our lives have been had it not been for 1148 Lewis street? Would we have had so much love and commitment between us? Would we have had fifty years plus of marital bonds that challenged and strengthened us, three wonderful daughters, six marvelous grandchildren, and a lifetime of community work? Looking back, it shatters me to imagine what might have been...

*"Tis' the ancestors' breath
When the fire's voice is heard
Tis' the ancestor's breath
In the voice of the waters..." (Birago Diop)*

For my risen comrades, sheroes and heroes who have journeyed on and left dreams behind for myself and others to realize.

For Carolyn Reams, my friend... who helped bring sanity in the middle of life's crazy moments and remembered Ann when Tamu was heavy.

For Brother President Imari Obadele, who's dedication to the upliftment of Afrikan people left me in awe and inspired a nation!

For Mayor Chokwe Lumumba I, my brother, friend and comrade. A legal powerhouse who lent his intellect, passion and Afrikan essence to empower oppressed people everywhere.

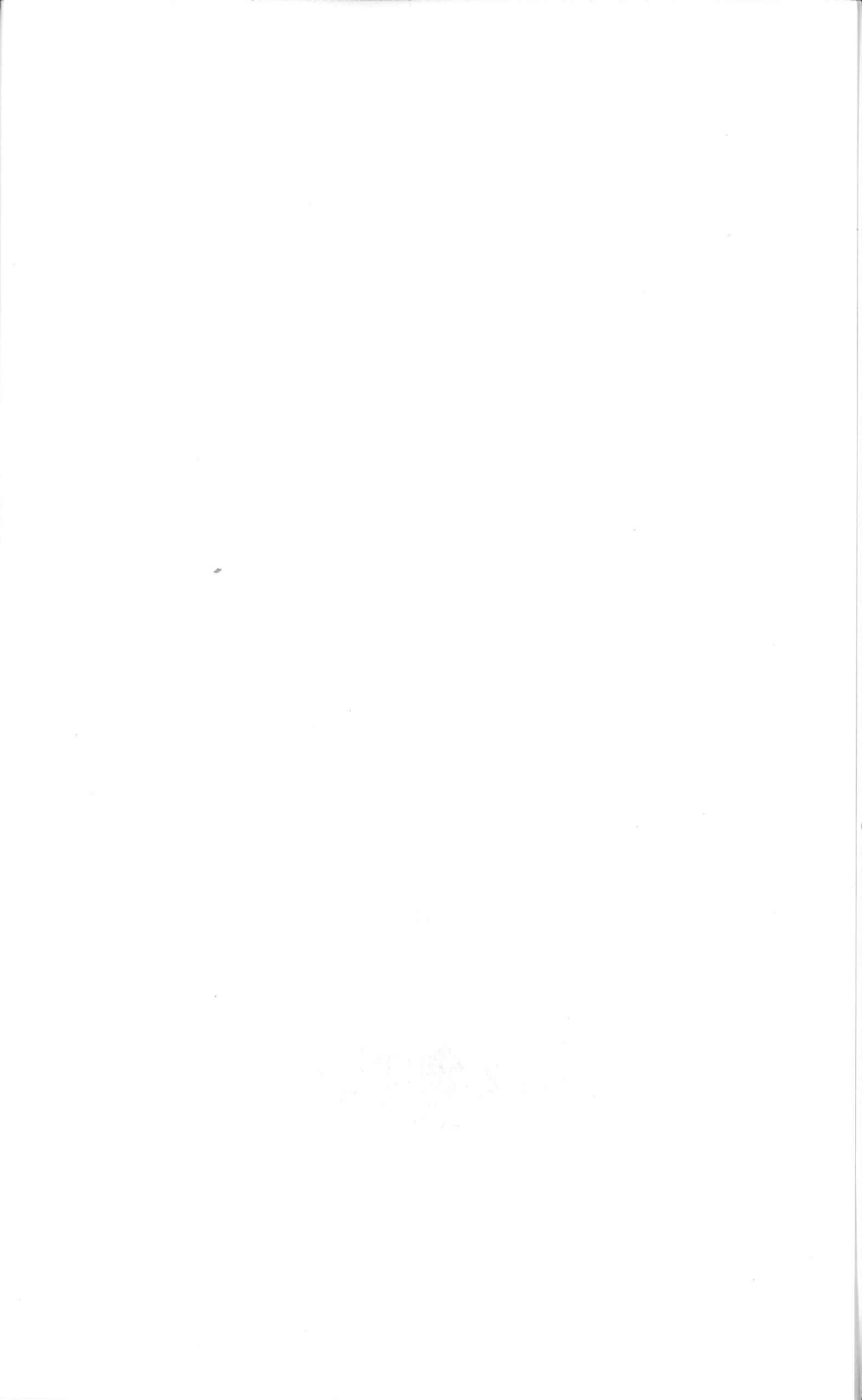
For Iya Fulani Nandi Sunni-Ali, who's entire life has been an example to myself and others, of sacrifice and dedication to the total liberation of Afrikan people world-wide. Fulani is my Sister, with me she shared her children, family, community, her vision...

For Sister Courage, Njere Alghanee, a powerful force, devoted to Afrikan liberation on many fronts including reparations. Her unyielding support in building the platform for Functional Unity continues to propel us forward.

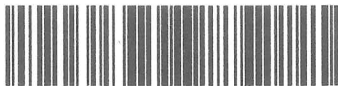
For Sister Latifa Carter, a Sister who left us far too soon, who had a heart bigger than most! The best friend that anyone could ever imagine, I love and miss her, but her roots run deep in her prosperous children.

For my friends and confidants, Jeanette (Sweetie) and Cleveland Bryant, who were warriors, community activist, and spent their lives helping others. They were both Enstooled (process of instillation for African royalty) as Paramount Chiefs during the African World Festival in Milwaukee, WI.

*For my beloved grandson,
Antonio Morrow Jr./Righteous Soljah/SaRa Shango,
Whose spirit is in me. I will forever miss his physical presence. I miss how he cared about me and helped with whatever I needed, be it around the house, or community work. His spirit and memories are with me each and every day. My love for him is eternal.. even when I have transitioned... that love will remain.*



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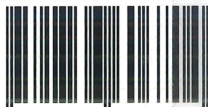
THE JOURNEY

...

... FROM A PLACE OF SECURE INNOCENCE TO LIFE ALTERING EXPERIENCES AND BACK AGAIN. THERE'S BEEN ROMANCE: FROM YOUNG LOVE TO A BROKEN MARRIAGE. FROM A SENSUOUS LOVE AFFAIR TURNED INTO A LIFETIME COMMITMENT AND COMRADERY. THERE'S BEEN THE FIGHT FOR LIBERATION: FROM THE LONG-LASTING STING OF WHITE SUPREMACY TO UNJUST INCARCERATION TO THE JOY OF VICTORIES ALONG THE WAY. FOR ME. THE BOUNDLESS BLESSING OF CREATING LIFE. THE BEAUTY OF MOTHERHOOD. THE COMING TOGETHER OF A FAMILY ONCE RIPPED APART. THE ANGELIC FEELING OF BECOMING A GRANDMOTHER TO THE HORRENDOUS PAIN OF LOSS... YET THROUGH IT ALL. I AM BLESSED!



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